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ALFRED & HIS MOTHER

KATHERINE E. MAY



1489. f. 1574.

ALFRED AND HIS MOTHER

OR

SEEKING THE KINGDOM



"Alfred did not appear daunted, but tried hard to force his way through his enemies."—ALFRED AND HIS MOTHER, Page 8.
(*Frontispiece.*)

ALFRED AND HIS MOTHER;

OR,

SEEKING THE KINGDOM.

BY

KATHARINE E. MAY.

'*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you.*'—ST. MATT. VI. 33.

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CHAPTER I.

A 'FIGHT' IN THE PLAYGROUND.

TWELVE o'clock had just sounded from the belfry of a handsome old church standing in the centre of a crowded city when, from a national school close by, there came trooping out some sixty or seventy boys, whose morning lessons had just come to an end. Some started for home, but many had brought their dinners carefully wrapped in handkerchiefs or pieces of paper, so as to make a hasty meal, and gain all possible time for a game in the large playground, which was so great a boon to the little citizens.

'Hallo, Alfred!' shouted one of these as he caught sight of a schoolfellow hurrying away. 'Where

are you off? Have you got such a jolly hot dinner waiting at home that you can't stay a bit?'

The boy addressed was a fine healthy fellow of about ten years old; *he* was sure to be missed from the playground, for there was not a heartier boy at all kinds of sport than Alfred Morgan, though I am sorry to say that he was by no means so hearty at work in school-hours.

'Why can't you stay?' he was again asked.

'Because mother's bad,' was the reply, 'and she wants me to go home.'

'*Mother!*' sneered his companion. 'I say, Bob, here's Morgan says he's going home 'cause his mother's bad; isn't that a likely story?'

'He shan't go, then, for telling such a lie,' said Robert Fielding, a tall bully of twelve years old; 'if his mammy *is* sick, I'm quite sure he's not mammy-sick after *her*,—a stepmother!'

And going towards the gate he set his back firmly against it, and looked around to see who would join him, and in an instant some half-dozen boys were at his side ready enough to lend a hand in barricading the playground if it would help to torment a schoolfellow. Alfred did not appear daunted, but

tried hard to force his way through his enemies. Unable to do this, he flew madly at Fielding, calling out in loud passionate tones, 'You big bully, you! *you've* not got a stepmother, and that's why your jacket is all in rags, and why, when you get home, everything is in such a muddle you can't find a chair to sit down in. I know if mothers is all like that I wouldn't have one, if I could.'

There was a great deal of truth in Morgan's passionate taunt, and many of the boys began to laugh and jeer at Fielding in his turn, while *he* lost no time in knocking Alfred down, and pouring forth such language of abuse as no Christian child should ever learn. And now a regular 'fight' began—to schoolboys this seems to have some strange charm—and a large number gathered round the combatants, some encouraging one, some the other, and such an uproar speedily arose that Mr. Hervey, the schoolmaster, who was quietly sitting in his own little parlour, became aware that some unusual excitement was going on, and walked out to see what the disturbance could mean.

'Robert Fielding, this is you again!' he said, while separating the two boys; 'if ever anything of this

kind occurs it is certain to be between you and some *smaller* boy. When *I* was at school we used to think it the height of cowardice for a boy to fight another less than himself.'

'Please, sir, he hit me first,' answered Fielding, sulkily; 'didn't he, Ben?'

'Yes,' replied the boy appealed to, 'but you began chaffing him, you know.'

'Did you begin this fight, Morgan, or not?' asked Mr. Hervey as he turned to Alfred, who stood silently by.

'Yes, sir,' he answered in a low voice, 'but Bob began giving me his impudence before I did anything to him.'

'Then I fear you are both equally wrong,' said Mr. Hervey, 'and therefore merit the same punishment; go back again into the school, and instead of enjoying the play I thought you would have, you will spend the rest of the morning indoors; you, Fielding, go into the class-room, and Morgan into the large room.'

Both boys followed their master in silence, Fielding sulky that his bullying had been interrupted, and Alfred rather stupefied by the blows he had received

and also by the sudden appearance of Mr. Hervey. The key was turned in the class-room door, and Alfred was about to be locked up when Mr. Hervey was startled by a sudden burst of tears from the boy. He paused in some astonishment, for this was an unusual proceeding on Alfred's part; he was accustomed to be 'kept in' about once a week on an average, and never could his master remember his thus taking the punishment to heart; so, feeling sure that something else might be amiss, he kindly asked what was the matter.

'Oh! please, sir, let me go!' was Alfred's only answer, with a fresh burst of tears.

'Certainly not,' replied Mr. Hervey. 'I am surprised that you should ask such a thing.'

'Oh! sir, if you'd give me a long task I wouldn't mind so, or beat me instead, but let me go home to mother; *please* do, she's ill in bed, and there's no one to help her but me. I told her I'd go home and not stop to play, nor get kept in either.'

Mr. Hervey recalled to mind that Alfred had been particularly steady that morning in school, and had evidently resisted a few temptations to play, or idle over his work, and anxious (as he always was)

not to punish unjustly, he questioned Alfred minutely as to his share in the quarrel.

'Well,' he said presently, 'I think I must set you free this once, as perhaps you are hardly so much to blame as your companion; but never let me hear again of any fighting, for another time you will not get off so easily.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Alfred gratefully; and then added, timidly, 'Please sir, it seemed so hard to hear mother laughed at, just because she's what they call a stepmother, when she's a deal kinder to me than many of their own mothers, above all, Fielding's; for he lives two doors off us, and we can often hear how she goes on at him and all the others; and just see, sir, what rags he always wears: why, *my* mother wouldn't let me stir out of the house like him for nothing.'

'Then, my lad, be thankful to God; I firmly believe that a good mother is the greatest earthly blessing He bestows: try and be grateful by showing yourself a good son, not by sneering at those less favoured than you are, and whom you ought to pity. But I don't want to keep you now, even to lecture, though many boys believe their masters always ready

to do that,' continued Mr. Hervey with a smile. 'When I have time I should like to run over and see your mother, and I'll ask Mrs. Hervey if she can go this afternoon with my little Lucy. Where do you live, Morgan?'

'No. 5 Bridge Lane, sir,' answered Alfred brightly, as, taking up his cap, he hastened to regain the liberty so lately lost. At the door a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and looking back quickly, he asked, 'Please, Mr. Hervey, may Bob come out, too?'

'Very well,' answered the master, and immediately opened the class-room door, telling Fielding that as Morgan had begged for his release, he too might go.

'Hallo there!' shouted a boy, as the two culprits reappeared in the playground; 'how did you get out?'

'Tried the whimpering dodge,' laughed Fielding, pointing to Alfred, 'so master let him go, poor little dear!'

'Well, *you* got out too,' cried Alfred, as he darted out of the yard, eager both to escape his tormentor and to make up for lost time.

While he scampers along the narrow streets leading to Bridge Lane, I will stop and tell you a little of Alfred's history.

His father, a worthless drunkard, had been left a widower when Alfred was only a few months old, and barely a year after had induced a respectable maid-servant to become his second wife. She, poor thing, was taken in by his fair promises of amendment, and her true woman's heart could not resist the pleading of a father that she would be a mother to his helpless child, which sacred trust she faithfully fulfilled to the letter, for there was not a boy in St. Mark's School whose mother took more pains and trouble with him than did Alfred Morgan's. The scanty sums of money occasionally brought home by the wretched father were always eked out to the best advantage; many a woman would have squandered the man's *whole* wages to less profit than did this poor woman the very small portion she ever received of her husband's earnings. A carpenter in full vigour of health, and a clever workman, Richard Morgan could have kept his family in comparative ease and comfort; but no, the madness of drink had so possessed him, that the wages of one day were usually spent the next at the nearest public-house; and at night he would come home to terrify his little household either with drunken mirth, or still worse, with drunken violence.

His wife patiently toiled on; one day it might be to earn a little money, and another to lay out her earnings to the best advantage, while every spare moment was spent in keeping her family and home in cleanliness and respectability. I am glad to say that Alfred was now beginning in some measure to repay his stepmother's love and care of him by being useful to her in many little ways about the house, and in running errands or in looking after the younger children, of whom there were now three. Clara, the eldest, a little girl of seven years old, had become totally blind after a violent attack of scarlet fever when she was only three; she was a cheerful sweet-tempered child, always anxious to do her utmost, and as a willing spirit often makes up for want of power, so this poor blind child had learnt to do many things in the house that some little girls and boys in full possession of every faculty, either *cannot* or *will not* do. Next to Clara came Johnny, a merry, round-faced little fellow, ever ready for fun, but always gentle towards his sister; even the family pet, Baby (or Dicky, as they were now beginning to call him), got rougher treatment from Johnny than did sweet little Clara, whom he tended with an almost lover-like affection. Such was the family party at

No. 5 Bridge Lane, and what a sunny little household it would have been but for the father's sad failing; and how many another family has its happiness for ever marred by this one absorbing passion—Drink!

CHAPTER II.

ALFRED AT HOME.

'WELL, my boy,' was Mrs. Morgan's greeting as Alfred entered the house, hot and breathless from his run, 'did you keep your promise?'

'Yes, mother,' he answered; 'that is, I was *very nearly* kept in, only master let me go.'

'Oh, Alfred!' exclaimed Clara, 'and you said you were going to be so good in school.'

'Yes, and I was, too: for Joe (that's the pupil-teacher) said he wished I was always like that; only just as I was coming home, that Fielding tried to stop me, and I gave him a hit, and so we got to a regular fight, and Mr. Hervey came out and sent us back into school.'

'But how did you get out so soon?' asked Clara.

'Oh, master asked me all about it, because he saw I was cut up about staying in, and he said I wasn't the worst, so he let us off this once. But here I am chattering away, when I meant to be warming up this drop of broth for mother.' And rushing to the cupboard, Alfred got out a saucepan and a cup full of something, which by courtesy was called 'broth,' though it was anything but a tempting-looking dainty for an invalid. With a few sticks he soon made up enough fire for his cookery, talking fast during all his performances. I cannot say that Alfred was as quiet in his movements or in his voice as a sick-nurse is always supposed to be, but love makes up for many deficiencies, and his kind mother did not expect too much from her high-spirited noisy little step-son.

'Mother,' he began again presently, 'why do you think I began giving it to Fielding?'

'You just said, my dear, that he tried to stop your coming home.'

'Yes, but that wasn't all; he was chaffing me about you; he said I did not want to come home because of you, for I didn't care for you, or something of the kind; I almost forget exactly what it was.'

'Then try, dear, to forget *quite* all about it; it can do no good to treasure up the unkind speeches we hear made, either of ourselves or others; you and I know we love one another (don't we?), in spite of what any one else may say.'

'I should just think so,' said Alfred, as he poured the contents of the saucepan into a cup and handed it to his mother, and then, with Clara's help, proceeded to get the bread and scrap of cheese provided for their own dinner.

'I wish,' said the poor woman as she sipped her plain fare, 'that I could give all of you this broth, my darlings, only I suppose it would not be right, since the doctor says I must take all the strengthening food I can, or I shan't get strong again; and then who 's to see after you, and do for you all?' she added, with tears in her eyes.

'Ay, mother, and so we want you to get well very fast, and not to think of giving your broth away; no, not even to Clara,' said Alfred, as his mother was holding the spoon towards her little girl.

'No, no,' said Clara; 'we 've got such nice cheese here that *we* can eat, though Alfred says *you* mustn't.'

'Ah!' sighed Alfred, 'I wish I was a rich man, and then mother should have such good things every day for dinner, not only when she was ill, but always; and so would *we*, eh, Clara?'

'Yes, indeed,' said the child, 'how happy we should all be!'

'Good things every day don't make people happy, my children,' said their mother from her bed; 'there's only one road to happiness for rich and poor alike, and that is the fear and love of God. "Better is little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith."'

'But, mother, I should like treasure and all that without the trouble,' said Alfred. 'Rich people are not always unhappy,—are they, mother?'

'No, dear, I hope not,' answered Mrs. Morgan; 'but there is an old saying that "Nobody knows where the shoe pinches but he who wears it;" there's a deal of trouble in the world, and rich people have *their* share as well as us, only it's different; God does what He thinks best for us all.'

'Well, mother,' continued Alfred, 'anyhow I want to try and be a rich man, that is, richer than we are now, and then we can all have nice soup like what I

see the gentlefolks getting in the cook-shops; and Clara can have some one to lead her about when I'm not by, and she wants to go out; can't you, Clara?'

'Why, *I* lead Clara when she wants it,' put in little Johnny, 'and when I'm big I shall always take care of her, like as if she was my little girl. I'm nearly big enough *now*, Alfred, so I'm sure we don't want anybody else.'

Every one laughed at Johnny's opinion of his stature, but his mother could not help praising him for being contented with things as they were.

'It isn't wrong to try and be a bit richer, is it, mother?' said Alfred.

'No, my dear, I don't think so, unless it were to make us forget God: only many folks, while they are trying to get money, seem to think there is nothing else to get, and that this world is all that's worth living for.'

'Like that silly rich man who thought he should live for ever so long, and enjoy all he had put away in his new barns,' said Clara, who was pretty well acquainted with most of the parables, and had her own quaint ways of applying them.

'Yes, just like that,' said her mother. 'Can you say the rest of that, either of you? wasn't it in your Scripture lesson for last Sunday? I think I remember you and Alfred going over it.'

Clara's blindness did not exclude her from Sunday-school training. Alfred always taught her the hymns and passages of Scripture learnt in the class, which, for her age, was an advanced one, for Clara was able to think and reason as well as her brother in most things; many sweet truths did both learn together, nor did the lesson always stop there, for (as in the present instance) the busy mother was often soothed, or taught a lesson herself, through overhearing the Word of God from her children's lips.

Alfred jumped up for the Bible, but Clara began at once with the passage their mother meant, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.' Alfred went on reading till he came to the verse, 'Rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.' 'That's what you've got to say next Sunday, Clara,' he said, shutting the book.

'And what a sweet lesson that is, boy,' said his mother; 'let us first try to do all that God tells us,

and He will add as many earthly blessings as He sees good for us, that 's the way I take it ; ask your teacher on Sunday, Clara, whether I 'm right or wrong, for I 'd like to know.'

A pause followed. Alfred was thinking how little he had hitherto sought the kingdom of God, and he was wondering whether his mother, who seemed to be seeking righteousness first, would ever have worldly goods added to her lot.

'I wish I was big enough to get my living, mother,' he said presently; 'at least, I wish you thought I was, for I know lots of fellows no bigger than me who earn ever so much. I 'm sure I could get a place as errand boy, and I should be helping a little then ; you wouldn't have my schooling to pay for, and I should like it a deal better. I don't much like school, mother.'

'No, but I wish you did, my son,' was Mrs. Morgan's reply ; 'anyhow I wish you could get on faster with your book ; it 's a sore struggle many a time to part with the money that goes to pay your schooling ; and yet there seems little or no good done by it,' added the poor woman with a sigh.

'Then, mother, why go on?' asked Alfred quickly.

'Oh, Alfred, as if you didn't know why! Isn't it because I am hoping to see you do well, and every one tells me that education does so much for a boy. Mr. Barrow was urging me only the other day to keep you on at school as long as I could afford it; it 's easier to get a good place when you 've got a bit of learning to fall back upon; besides, my dear, how little of God's Word would you ever know, with no one but me to teach you. I think *you* are fitter to teach *me!*'

'Nay, mother, that 's not the case,' said Alfred, giving her a rough kiss; and then, after apparently thinking over the matter, he said, 'I don't *like* stopping on at school, for I 'm sick and tired of it; but I 'll try and get on better to please you.'

'That 's my good Alfred!' answered his mother with a pleased smile.

'It seems a dröll way of seeking the kingdom, though,' he added in a low voice, as he hastened to tidy the room a little before leaving. This point was evidently too difficult a question to be decided by any of the party, and all were silent until little Clara's sweet voice broke out presently, as it often did, in one of their Sunday-school hymns,

'We are but little children weak,
Not born in any high estate;
What can we do for Jesu's sake
Who is so high and good and great?'

Alfred was lingering about until she came to the words,

'With smiles of peace and looks of love,
Light in our dwellings we may make,
Bid kind good humour brighten there,
And do all still for Jesu's sake.

There's not a child so small and weak,
But has his little cross to take,
His little work of love and praise,
That he may do for Jesu's sake.'

With these last two verses ringing in his ears, he started for school; and I think that, at that moment with his resolution fresh in his mind, Alfred Morgan was 'not far from the kingdom of God.'

CHAPTER III.

FIRST EFFORTS IN 'SEEKING THE KINGDOM.'

ALFRED entered the schoolroom that afternoon with the full determination of doing his best in every way, nor did he altogether forget through whose help alone it is that any of us can ever do our 'best;' and a little unspoken prayer for that help passed from his mind as he sat down to begin his duties. The writing lesson passed off very creditably; and the arithmetic, his usual stumbling-block, was so much better that Mr Hervey seemed thoroughly pleased, and patting his head, congratulated him warmly on his improved steadiness this afternoon. Alfred was not exactly a stupid boy, though he might often have passed for one, because his mind was seldom in his lessons. While putting

down figures and apparently working a sum, his thoughts were often far away; sometimes counting the runs he could make 'supposing' he were playing cricket with such a one: at other times some plan for getting a livelihood was running in his head, and he would dream of the luxuries they would all enjoy 'some day.'

Again, Alfred was generally ready for a laugh with any idle schoolfellow, and when Mr Hervey's back was turned, would ornament his own or a companion's face and hands with blots done in various patterns, even at the risk of being kept in, when the laugh he could never restrain betrayed his mischief. Now, all these idle ways, whether open fun or day-dreams, are sad hindrances to any boy's improvement; those who are really *clever* cannot afford to lose time in this way, and boys who, like Alfred, have only ordinary abilities, will very soon rank as dunces. Mr Hervey's motto with his scholars was, 'Work while you work, and play while you play,' but Alfred had by no means carried it out as yet; the *latter* part agreed most fully with his inclinations, but work (or *head*-work at least) was better let alone he thought.

However, as I have just said, on this particular

afternoon Alfred was heartily doing his work, and was reaping the reward of his efforts by feeling that light-heartedness which nothing can give but the sense of trying to do one's duty. There wanted but half-an-hour to the end of school when the door opened and Mr. Barrow, the clergyman, entered; he took a great interest in the boys, and would often hear a class himself, or at other times just a few general questions of examination to the whole school. His younger parishioners both loved and feared their pastor; anxious to win his approval, his kind smile and pleasant words of praise were real rewards to those who merited them, and yet idle and careless ones dreaded few things more than the knowledge of their misdoings reaching Mr. Barrow's ears; it was rarely that he 'scolded,' but to be passed over unnoticed, or frowned upon by him, was felt a keen disgrace. Never did Alfred feel so much ashamed on account of his idleness, as on those days when Mr. Barrow visited the school, and taking his class, found him usually at the same rule in arithmetic, making the same mistakes in dictation, and repeating the same lessons in grammar as the week before. But to-day he felt quite differently, and on Mr. Barrow's

entrance at once leant forward and tried various ways of attracting his attention, longing to have his slate examined and copy-book praised. In a few moments he succeeded, and the clergyman walked across the room, and looking over his shoulder, admired his afternoon's performance, but it did not require much penetration to see that though for once in a way Alfred's sums were right, they were very little in advance of those seen a few days before.

'This little fellow's mother is very anxious that he should get on, and to-day he does seem to have got on,' said Mr. Barrow, turning to the schoolmaster. 'What have you to say about him, Mr. Hervey?'

'Not much, sir,' was the answer. '*To-day* he has really done well, but with this exception, I cannot believe that he has made the slightest progress during the last month.'

'Well, if he has improved to-day, we must hope that he means to "turn over a new leaf" now, and give some encouragement both to you and his mother,' said Mr. Barrow kindly.

'I hope so,' answered Mr. Hervey; 'if he would always go on as steadily as he has done to-day there

is no reason why he might not do as well as any boy in the school.'

'There, Alfred, you hear that,' said Mr. Barrow; 'now you have shown us what you *can* do, we are going to expect great things of you; but don't rest satisfied with to-day's performances and think they are enough without any more perseverance on your part. "One swallow does not make a summer," as the saying is, and it will take a great many days' perseverance to make a lasting improvement. But I must not keep all the school waiting while I talk, must I? What lesson comes off next, Mr. Hervey? Can I be of any use to you?'

'I was going to give them a geography lesson, sir,' replied the master; 'if you will take it, I know we shall all be very glad.'

Mr. Hervey was right, for all eyes brightened at the idea of a geography lesson from Mr. Barrow; he had the rare gift of imparting knowledge well and pleasantly, and the half-hour's lesson seemed over in a few minutes, so interesting was the long imaginary voyage which he took his little scholars, telling them the story of Columbus, and describing the countries and islands he passed on his way to the New World,

and working up the boys to a pitch of excitement when the newly-discovered continent was finally reached.

When four o'clock struck, and the boys were dismissed, Mr. Barrow called Alfred to him and inquired after his mother; hearing she was rather worse than when he had seen her, he offered to accompany Alfred in his walk home and pay another visit to the poor woman. Of course this was a good opportunity for talking over his future prospects and present school life. But I will not detail the whole conversation, for I trust that my readers are not ignorant of the advantages which a good education gives to those who wish to 'get on in life.' By degrees, however, the conversation took a different turn, and Alfred found himself telling Mr. Barrow his new difficulty, namely, how when staying at school was only to further his worldly prosperity, his doing so could help him in 'seeking the kingdom.' Did it not seem that his proper course would be to leave school at once, and go out to earn the bread so dearly bought, and thus help the kind mother who did so much for him.

'This sounds very good and self-denying, my boy,'

answered the clergyman, 'and yet it may not be so at all. Not that I would blame you for wishing to leave school so as to be more assistance to your mother, but try *now* to give up the wish, and let your first step in seeking the kingdom be to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." And do not forget, Alfred, that school, and what we learn there, should not only fit us for life in *this* world, but it should help us in living for the "world to come."'

By this time they had reached Alfred's home, and as they entered, Mr. Barrow was much pleased to see the welcome his little friend received from his sister and brother, though its warmth was somewhat moderated, on account of a little shyness at the clergyman's appearance.

Mrs. Morgan was delighted at seeing Mr. Barrow return with her boy; she was pleased to think that Alfred had had such a companion, and pleased to receive another visit from her pastor so soon again. After a little friendly conversation, Mr. Barrow easily discovered the poor woman's chief needs, and promising to supply some of them, he left, though not until he had read a few verses of Scripture at the bedside, and endeavoured to make their meaning clear.

Scarcely had he closed the door than two other visitors arrived in the persons of Mrs. Hervey, the schoolmaster's wife, and Lucy, their only child, a sunny little maiden of nine years old. They had come prepared to assist in any household matters where they could be of use, and immediately set to work, with Alfred's help, to prepare tea for the whole party; and what a tea they all had that evening! Mrs. Hervey had brought with her a little parcel of good tea, with some fresh butter and two or three muffins, which she thought might tempt the invalid to eat and also be an extra treat to the children. Little Johnny kept very close to Clara, holding her hand all tea time, partly with an idea of protecting her, and still more of protecting himself, for he felt somewhat shy of the new-comers, and though much enjoying his good tea, felt puzzled to understand all about it; he kept his large blue eyes fixed on Lucy with great admiration, but clung closer still to his sister whenever any attempt was made to be more friendly with him.

Mrs. Hervey did not remain very long after tea was over; setting the house a little straight for them, she went home, leaving them all far more comfortable than they had been for many days.

'Thank God for His mercies,' said Mrs. Morgan, as her children wished her 'good-night;' 'don't let us forget to seek His kingdom first of all. Do you know, Alfred, after you went to school this afternoon I took up the Psalms to read, and one verse has been in my mind ever since, it seemed to come in so well with what we had been talking about,—"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."'

CHAPTER IV.

THE POLICEMAN.

DO you wonder how Alfred succeeded in his efforts, and whether he became at once the good steady schoolboy he was trying to be? There is many a boy and girl trying too to 'seek the kingdom,' and they can tell you that Alfred must have got on (if he persevered), as all do who have the same end in view; often finding it hard work, sometimes tempted to give it up altogether, yet oftener gaining ground, and earning that peace of God within the breast 'which none but he who feels it knows;' for 'The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.'

Old habits of idleness made it hard work to remember his promise *every day*, but Alfred was really im-

proving, because he tried with all his might, and did not forget that *his* might was nothing without the Almighty help promised to those who ask it.

Bob Fielding still continued the same cowardly tormentor I have already represented him, and as he lived so near Alfred, and was also in the same class, it was difficult to keep out of his way, and difficult to keep down the anger that would often rise at his sneers and provoking ways. By degrees, however, Alfred worked his way into a higher class, so that in school-hours at least, he was free from his tormentor, though he received many provocations in play-time, for Bob, like most *idle* dunces, was jealous of any one sufficiently industrious to pass him in school.

One afternoon, when lessons had barely commenced, master and boys alike were somewhat startled by the entrance of Mr. Barrow in company with the organist of St. Mark's. The clergyman had already paid his weekly visit to the school, so that all knew he must have come for some special object to-day, and with expectant ears waited for his first words.

'Mr. Hervey,' he began, 'our friend here, Mr.

Smith, tells me that our choir is falling off sadly owing to the loss of two good voices, boys who have left the town, and partly owing, I fear, to either want of confidence, or to laziness, in those that are left,' he said, turning with a smile to those choir boys who stood near. 'Now we want to select three more, and if you, Mr. Hervey, will kindly allow Mr. Smith to choose some voices, we must ask you to decide which of those boys chosen are the most diligent and regular scholars, for you know I consider it a privilege and an honour to be numbered amongst our singers, and therefore wish to make it a reward.'

The first two classes were then called up (none lower producing sufficiently good readers for the purpose required), and Mr. Smith soon discovered four or five tolerable voices which would do in the choir. Two boys were quickly chosen, having musical powers, and bearing the requisite good characters. The choice of the third now rested between Robert Fielding and Alfred Morgan. Evidently the organist preferred the former, but he hesitated on seeing the expression which crossed the faces of both clergyman and schoolmaster.

'Which do *you* say?' asked Mr. Barrow of the latter.

'*Not* Fielding,' was the brief reply.

Alfred became breathless with anxiety; could it really be that *he* was the chosen one? Burning with excitement, he looked eagerly from Mr. Barrow to Mr. Hervey, hoping that nothing would be said against him.

'And what do you think of Morgan's joining the choir?' asked Mr. Barrow; 'will *he* be steady enough, do you think, Mr Hervey?'

'Morgan has done better for the last two months, sir, and, as you know, has at last been promoted to the first class, so that I hope he means to try and conduct himself well.'

Mr. Barrow gave a glance at the anxious child, and (though I must acknowledge he had some slight doubt of his fitness), he added cheerfully—

'Well, let it be so. You must try and keep up your character, Alfred. I always like to encourage any boy who is making an effort to do right, and as I really believe you are doing so, I shall promote you in a way I could not have dreamt of some time ago; take care not to forfeit it by any of your own misdoings. Will you have this little fellow, Mr. Smith?'

Alfred was too much excited to speak, but what a

tide of joy rushed through his little heart! That he, who had often been held up as an example of idleness, and sometimes of bad conduct, should now be ranked amongst the steadiest boys in the school! How glad mother would be! She would see that his promise to her had been kept.

Mr. Barrow was right in saying that he made it an honour for any boy to belong to his choir; those boys who did so, were, as you have just seen, selected from the best scholars, and, in addition to the musical education they received, were admitted to the school on payment of half the usual sum for a year, after which time they were entirely free scholars. Besides these advantages, they all received a Christmas-box of five shillings, the head boy getting more; but any misdemeanour in church, or gross misconduct of any sort elsewhere, was punished by immediate expulsion. Alfred remembered having heard of such a case, and what a disgrace every one had thought it; he resolved that he would never so disgrace himself and his school, while he also remembered with a smile, how he had reverenced the choir boys (not so very long ago!) and fancied them on a pinnacle of excellence to which he could never attain; *now*,

would younger and more backward boys so look up to *him?*

Such were the thoughts which were passing quickly through our little friend's mind, as he hastened home that afternoon to tell the good news to 'mother' and Clara. Presently he was startled, even amidst the noise of the street, by a loud rough voice calling him by name, and looking behind, found (as he expected) that Bob Fielding was fast overtaking him. Alfred's heart sank. 'Now for a jolly row,' thought he, 'I wish I could get out of it; but how can I?'

'Well,' began Fielding as he came up with Alfred, 'so you are off to tell "dear mammy" the news, I suppose, how you are going to look such a nice little boy at church every Sunday, and sing like a nightingale, eh?'

'I only wish I could,' said Alfred, with a laugh.

'Ay, I daresay you do; but let me tell you, you needn't think yourself such a swell, for Mr. Smith would a deal rather have had *me* in the choir than you, any day; and what's more, I mean to get in, too. *There!* what do you think of that?'

'Why, I should be very glad,' said Alfred, quite

truthfully, 'because then I should know you were a better sort of chap than you are now, for you couldn't get in else.'

'Couldn't I?' sneered the boy; 'I know a trick worth two of that, and so you'll see, Mr. Saint,' and he savagely hit his little companion on the face. This was a sort of blow that irritated Alfred more than any, and he immediately dealt Fielding a tolerably severe one in return.

'What are you youngsters about there?' called out a policeman who had just caught sight of them; 'you'd better not try that game in the street, unless you want to be locked up.'

Alfred had a dread of policemen, the *sight* of one had often checked him when about to forget himself, so you may imagine how he felt when addressed by one in the very midst of his quarrel. He would have walked quietly home, though still burning with rage against his enemy, had not the latter come up softly the next minute and said in his ear, 'Are you afraid of a *bobby*, little 'un, or are you going to sneak home to mammy, and tell her how you're hurt?'

'Neither one nor the other,' answered Alfred furi-

ously, dealing another of his hardest blows, an act which did not escape the policeman's eye, although Fielding's provoking words had passed unheard.

'Do you mean to dare me?' exclaimed the man, seizing Alfred by the collar of his jacket; 'you shall pay for this, my young man, if you don't take a warning in time.'

Fielding ran off, grinning at his companion's distress, and saying, 'Oh no, he's not afraid of a bobby, not he!'

The policeman kept fast hold of Alfred; he was angry at the boy's disregard of him in the first instance, and determined to show his authority in the matter; therefore, in spite of tears and entreaties, such as had moved Mr. Hervey on a former occasion, Alfred found himself dragged off to the station-house, where we shall have to leave him for the rest of the day, yes, and night too, for the magistrates had done 'sitting' for that day, and would not begin their business again until ten o'clock the next morning.

Meanwhile there was great anxiety felt at Bridge Lane. Clara had been listening eagerly for her brother's footsteps, so eagerly that little Johnny had

run to the street door to keep watch for Alfred, hoping that his bright eyes would quickly descry his brother, and so relieve Clara of any longer suspense. But, no; the poor little fellow watched long and patiently, until Mrs. Morgan called him in to tea, saying, she was 'afraid Alfred must have been a very naughty boy to have been kept in so late.' Another hour passed, but no Alfred came, and all were getting seriously anxious; the mother, now quite recovered from her late illness, bustled about with her household matters, hoping to hide her fears from the children, and so, if possible, to quiet theirs. Johnny was too young to understand it, beyond wishing that his brother would come back and get his tea and play with him; but Clara sat, still and pale, and tears occasionally rolled from her poor little sightless eyes, as she listened vainly for Alfred's well-known voice and footstep.

'Mother!' she gasped at last, '*is he dead?*'

Her mother started. 'God forbid!' she exclaimed, 'but something has happened to keep him like this. If Dicky would but go to sleep, then I could go out and see what's become of the boy, bless his dear heart! But, stay, the young Fieldings may know

something about him; you go in, Clara, and ask, Johnny will take care of you, won't you, my man?' she continued, reaching down their hats.

Johnny triumphantly led his sister into their neighbour's house. 'Where's Alfred?' he asked, as Mrs. Fielding came to the door.

'How should *I* know?' was the answer; 'I've got enough to do to mind my own brats (and more than enough too), without seeing after other folk's. Ain't he home from school?'

'We haven't seen him,' said Clara gently; 'and mother thought Bob or Lizzie might know something about him.'

'Well, come in and ask them,' said the woman, going inside. What a miserable home it looked! even after the Morgans' poor abode, which at least was *clean;* but here, the floor looked almost black with accumulated dirt; in one corner lay a heap of rags, supposed to be the children's stock of clothes, but looking more like the contents of an old clothesman's pack; in another, food, crockery, boots, soap, needles and thread were thrust indiscriminately. Bob's father sat smoking a pipe over the few ashes that remained of the fire, while Bob himself and the

two other children were each eating a great piece of bread and cheese at a rickety table.

'Where 's Alfred?' Johnny began once more, keeping fast hold of Clara's hand, for, disgusted at the dirt himself, he fancied his sister would realize it too. 'Bob, was Alfred kept in to-day?'

'No,' answered the boy with his mouth full.

'Well, then, where is he?' asked Clara, anxiously.

'Ah! where do you think?' said Bob, who was not to be deterred from teasing, even by poor Clara's tearful face and Johnny's frightened look.

'Do you think he's gone to Mr. Barrow's?' continued the bully.

'Oh, I hope he has!' sighed Clara, in a tone of relief.

'Yes,' said Johnny, 'for perhaps he 'll bring back something nice.'

'Ay, I daresay he 'll bring you back something *awful* jolly!' went on Bob.

'Here, I 'll tell you what 'tis,' interrupted Mrs. Fielding, 'you two little brats must just be off home, and let my boy get his bit of supper in peace: how do *he* know what 's come to your brother?'

But the poor children were less easily daunted.

Clara was too anxious to know 'for certain' (as she called it) about Alfred, and Johnny, always watching her face, tried to act as she seemed to wish.

'But Bob, do you *know* where he is?' they both asked again.

'Oh yes, I know! and such a sweet pretty place it is too,' he answered, grinning.

Johnny was puzzled, and Clara got frightened at the coarse, sneering manner of the rude boy.

'Do tell us,' said Johnny, after a moment's pause.

'Do you want to know? Well then, he's gone to the station-house?' said Bob, with his ill-natured grin; 'go back and tell mother, there's little dears!' she'll be so glad to hear where her darling's got to! There, be off,' he continued, pushing them both out of the door. 'You might at least say "thank you," when you've been bothering me all this time to tell you.'

Hand in hand the two poor children went home to break the sad news to their mother, who lost no time in going to the station to make all inquiries about the boy's misdemeanour, and try to procure his release; but no. Police-constable Jones was 'not to be moved from doing his duty,' he said; and he talked

a great deal about the necessity of punishing boys for 'causing obstructions in the highway,' etc., and advised Mrs. Morgan to teach her boy to mind what was said to him another time, and said that, 'as she had not been able to do that all these years, she ought to feel much obliged to them as would take the trouble for her, which was what *he* was doing.'

So, with a sad and disappointed heart, the poor woman went her way, and spent the night in wondering how Alfred could have thus given way and disgraced himself and them all. Surely he did not mean to go from bad to worse, and end by treading in his father's steps; and she had been rejoicing in the boy's improvement, and the good character he seemed winning at school! She felt sure that Fielding had somehow been the cause of it all; and yet, how had he got off, while her boy was locked up? It was a question hard to answer: so she did what is best for all to do in times of doubt and difficulty, she left it in God's hands, and prayed that He would watch over the child, and make this trouble a lesson both to him and the younger ones.

CHAPTER V.

ALFRED SET FREE.

IT was nine o'clock the next morning, and Mr. Hervey was calling over the names in the large school register, preparatory to recommencing the day's routine of work; he came to 'Alfred Morgan,' but there was a pause instead of the ready '*Here, Sir,*' which usually followed. Presently two or three voices answered '*Absent.*'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Hervey in some surprise. 'Robert Fielding, you live very near him, do you happen to know why he is not here? Is he ill?'

'No, sir,' answered Bob; 'he's not ill, but, please sir, he was took up yesterday.'

A thrill of astonishment went through the school; the more orderly boys would not believe it, and those

of Fielding's set nodded and winked at each other, making many jokes about Alfred's being no better than they, 'in spite of his getting over the master.'

'*Taken up!*' exclaimed Mr. Hervey; 'and what for, Fielding?'

'Please, sir, *I* don't know nothing about it. I seed the *pleeceman* walking off with un, and that's all I knows.'

'Did any other boy witness the affair?' asked the master, looking round; but there was little need to ask the question, for the astonishment of all was sufficient proof of their ignorance.

So the morning's work began, the usual hymn was sung, and Mr. Hervey felt sad as he missed in it the voice of one out of the three new choir boys; sad, because he had lately been hoping better things of Alfred, and his hopes seemed all disappointed. It was with a heavy heart that he conducted school that morning; one lesson after another reminded him of the absent boy whose improvement had lately been so marked, and whose bright looks, when he was attentive, were quite an encouragement to his painstaking teacher.

'Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest

he fall,' mused Mr. Hervey, as the recollection of Alfred occurred often to his mind. 'I suppose the boy was elated at my giving him a good character, and so forgot to persevere, and, full of conceit, gave way to some temptation on the road home. But *what?* I cannot help thinking that Fielding knows more about it than he pretends, and is probably at the bottom of it all. I hope I am not growing unjustly suspicious, though,' he continued, trying to rouse himself to think more of the ninety and nine sheep then in the fold, than of the one who was lost. At last twelve o'clock struck, and Mr. Hervey, having dismissed the boys, went into his house, fetched his hat, and, taking Lucy with him, set out for Alfred's home, in order, if possible, to get at the rights of the matter.

While he is on the way, we will see what has become of the boy since we left him under the unpleasant charge of Police-constable Jones. It was past eleven o'clock before Alfred's case was brought before the magistrate, and by that time the poor boy was almost worn out with grief and suspense. This the magistrate soon perceived; and being himself the father of several boys, he was perhaps more inclined

to be lenient with Alfred's fault as the latter simply told his tale, which no amount of cross-questioning altered at all; so with a few words of caution for the future, he dismissed him. Oh, how thankfully did Alfred feel the fresh spring breezes blow in his face as he first stepped out into the street! His short captivity had seemed so long!

In a very few minutes, however, a deep sense of disgrace came over him, and a feeling that every one he met must know where he had just come from; and with downcast eye and slower step he reached his home. There he found all very much as he usually did on his return from morning school: Johnny carefully rocking the cradle that Dicky might soon be persuaded to fall into his mid-day sleep; Clara's busy little fingers 'putting things straight' on the shelves, and mother sweeping the floor while their frugal dinner was warming on the fire. Clara's quick ears instantly detected her brother's step, and hurrying across the room was soon clasped in his arms.

'Oh, Alfred!' was his mother's first exclamation, 'they 've let you out; I hope, my dear, you 'll never go for to do it again!'

'No, mother,' he answered meekly, and then sobbed

out as she took him to her breast, 'but you don't know all, mother, you must hear *my* side of the story, and you won't think me so bad perhaps; though I know I've been wrong,' he added more quietly. 'Mother, I'm downright tired of seeking the kingdom, and I'll give it all up if it brings one into trouble like this.'

'Nay, my lad,' said Mrs. Morgan soothingly, 'don't talk like that; I'll be bound it wasn't seeking the kingdom that brought you into trouble; but if it was, then we must trust the good Lord to bring you out of it all clear: but let's hear your story, my man, for I'm mighty puzzled to make it all out.'

Alfred told his story amidst many tears, for his feelings were very bitter; he dwelt but little on his happiness at being chosen a chorister, for he felt it was all over now: the reward had come to his many weeks' perseverance, and he had lost it by a very few minutes' yielding to temptation.

As Alfred was talking to his mother, with Clara seated on his knee, and Johnny at a more respectful distance (for the child felt a little awe at his brother's late contact with a policeman), Mr. Hervey and Lucy knocked at the door.

Alfred would gladly have made his escape, had it been possible, so ashamed did he feel; but Mr. Hervey's entrance was too sudden for that.

Lucy came up and shook hands as usual, but Alfred hardly knew how he ought to greet either her or her father, and he stood still with his head hung down.

'Now, Mrs. Morgan,' began Mr. Hervey, as he took the seat placed for him by the poor woman, 'I have come to ask you and Alfred the rights of the story I have just heard, and which I was very, very grieved to hear, as you may suppose.'

'You are very kind, sir,' she answered; 'Alfred's too tired and cut up to speak to you about it himself, I expect; so I 'll tell you all as he told me, and if I don't say it quite right, he must put in his word.'

The tale was once more told, and Mr. Hervey and Lucy listened with attentive ears.

'I agree with you, Mrs. Morgan,' said the schoolmaster when the recital was ended, 'that Alfred's trouble did not come through *seeking* the kingdom, but by losing sight of it for a little while. Don't think of giving up, my boy,' he said, turning to the sorrowful child, '"No man, having put his hand to

the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."'

There was a short pause, and then Alfred said mournfully, as he looked in Mr. Hervey's face, 'But the choir, sir—I suppose I 've lost that?'

'I fear so,' replied the master; 'for you know that Mr. Barrow hesitated a little even yesterday, about choosing you, and when he knows this, I do not think he will be likely to let you join. This you must take as the consequence of your failure, but not as a motive for giving up trying to serve God in future.'

'It would have been such a help to mother!' sobbed Alfred; 'and I was coming along, thinking how glad she 'd be, and how she 'd say it was like the good things being added after we had begun to seek the kingdom, and then—then all in a minute I lost everything!'

'You have lost that reward,' said Mr. Hervey, 'but you have not lost *everything*, for you have not lost the habit of trying to do God's will, and perhaps another reward will come some day. At all events, you know there is one to come by-and-bye, the Reward all Christians work for, leaving earthly prizes to come or not, as God sees fit.'

'Oh, father!' cried Lucy, who had hitherto been silently watching Alfred's distress, 'can't you ask Mr. Barrow to let poor Alfred belong to the choir? You can tell him you think he will be a good boy—oh, do!'

'Yes, I will do my best,' replied her father, 'but I still believe that Mr. Barrow will not allow him to join, so we must not give any false hopes with a view of comforting your friend.' And with a kind farewell Mr. Hervey left the house, as it was drawing near his accustomed dinner hour.

The schoolmaster was right; Mr. Barrow would not hear of Alfred's being a chorister after what had happened; he said that in spite of his scrape not being so bad as it had appeared (if *his* version of it was correct) it would not do to receive him at once into the choir after all that had been said, especially when there were many boys to be found on whose character no shadow rested; and as Robert Fielding still denied being the aggressor on this occasion, it seemed as if Alfred's conduct might have been the worst, for he had been the only one punished, and no evidence could be brought to prove the contrary; except that Mr. Hervey certainly believed Alfred in

preference to his companion, who had been several times convicted of falsehood.

So another boy was chosen to fill the vacant post, and matters went on in much the same way as before. Alfred still persevered in patience and prayer, and often felt sorry to think how nearly he had 'given up' seeking the kingdom.

CHAPTER VI.

BOB IN THE INFIRMARY.

TO every one's astonishment, Bob Fielding seemed to take a step in improvement after the occurrence related in the last chapter. No one was more surprised than Alfred, for he often thought how unhappy Bob must be, after maintaining such a falsehood as he had told. There were many in the school who believed his version of the tale, but those who knew Alfred best felt more inclined to trust *his* word of the two, especially as it was well known that he had often much to put up with from his disagreeable neighbour. In time many had completely forgotten it, and you may be sure that Alfred did not remind them.

One fine morning, as he was running merrily along

to school, a crowd in the middle of the street attracted his attention. Few boys can pass quietly on their way when there is an unusual excitement in the street, and Alfred was not one of the few. By dint of much exertion, he forced his way into the midst of the crowd, and discovered that a boy had just been knocked down and run over, by a large waggon. Some of the bystanders said he was dead, some that he was 'all right,' others that his leg was broken, and many that it was his own fault for playing at marbles and not looking at what was coming. Alfred did not stop till he was able to satisfy his own eyes on the subject, and when he did, what was his horror at seeing in the mangled heap of broken limbs lying before him, his old enemy, Robert Fielding! *Was he dead?* and with this thought a shudder passed through the boy's frame; turning sick and giddy, he would have fallen, had not a strong man standing near, supported him.

'What ails thee, lad?' he asked kindly; ''tis no kith nor kin of thine, sure?'

'No, no,' answered Alfred, 'but he's a'—*friend* he was nearly saying, but checking the word, altered it to '*neighbour*, and I know him very well; he

lives at Bridge Lane, No. 3. Oh, Bob! Bob!' he cried, leaning over him, as the men were preparing to lay him on a shutter just procured, 'you're not dead? Oh, just say you're not dead!'

A groan from the wretched boy as he was being touched, proved that he was yet living, though oh, how dreadfully injured!

Alfred was sent off to tell Mrs. Fielding what had happened, and to say that her son was being carried to the infirmary. She received the news with a great display of violent grief at the first, and then changed her tone, saying,—

'I always told him, the good-for-nothing! that he'd come to a bad end; and here he's just gone and crippled hisself all to pieces! Where do you say they've took him?'

'To the infirmary,' said Alfred a second time.

'Ah! then, he'll get the best advice there, and 'tendance too, I'll be bound; you just go back and say (if he asks for me) that maybe I'll look in and see him when I've tidied up the place a bit, and dressed this plague of an infant,' she continued, giving a shake to the child in question. 'Bob always were a torment from his very cradle, and so they all

be for that matter,' she rattled on. 'What a thing it is to have a family!' with which tender remark she proceeded with her tidying, which consisted of sweeping all that was in the middle of the room into its four corners, while Alfred ran back to see whether the poor boy was yet removed, and if he were able to hear his mother's message: thinking, as he ran along, that his stepmother, so often Bob's laughing-stock, would never have treated any such horror connected with *him* in so heartless a manner.

All trace of the accident had quite disappeared when Alfred reached the spot, except that Police-constable Jones was standing near, as if to keep guard over the place, and answer any questions concerning the accident which might be put by inquisitive people. Alfred had not yet overcome his dread of the policeman, so without delay he hurried to school, for which he was now very late; but his excuse was readily taken, for his master had long abandoned any doubt of his truthfulness. Bob, disliked though he was by teachers and scholars, still met with ready sympathy in his terrible accident, for all were shocked by Alfred's account, his white, frightened face seemed to impart its terrified expression to the whole school.

'Will he die, Alfred?' asked one of his schoolfellows as they left the schoolroom.

'I don't know,' whispered Alfred; 'he *looked* dead when I saw him, but they said he wasn't. Oh, I hope he won't die! He's not fit.'

'No, I shouldn't think so,' said the little fellow; 'but he's been good lately, Morgan; and just see how many verses out of the Bible he said last Sunday in school.'

Alfred made no answer. He would not refer to the awful falsehood in which Fielding had so long persisted; but he knew that repeating any number of Bible verses was not sufficient to save a soul, and never had he so thoroughly realized the value of our Saviour's injunction—'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness'—as now, with his schoolfellow's unprepared state vividly brought before before him. How insignificant earthly things appeared with eternity in view! 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

Such were Alfred's thoughts, as he could not help guessing at Bob's probable motive for his apparent

goodness; but he would not speak them aloud. No, he had been seeking the kingdom long enough to have learned a little of the Love which *covers* a neighbour's sins, instead of proclaiming them; and now his greatest wish in regard to his unhappy companion might have been expressed in the words of the saint of old—'We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good.'

It was some hours after the accident, that Alfred, in company with Mr. Hervey, was on his way to the infirmary. On arriving there, they described the case of the poor patient they had come to see, and being the hour allowed for visits, the porter admitted them, and consulted his book in order to guide them to the suffering boy.

'Let me see,' he said; 'a casualty, I think, you asked for? that will be Ward 6, and the case is No. 9. That way, sir, and turn to the left, and you'll find yourself there; hope the poor boy will live, sir; but bad case they say, very.'

Alfred shuddered, and kept very close to his master's side, as they entered the long ward of 'casualties,' or cases of accident. What a sad sight it was!



"Just now, however, he had a short interval of consciousness, and was able to recognise his school-fellow."—ALFRED AND HIS MOTHER, Page 63.

Two rows of beautifully clean beds filled the ward, each containing some pitiful case of suffering; but none was more agonizing to look upon than the one our visitors sought, poor Robert Fielding, lying with such torture racking every limb, that he was oftener delirious than sensible, and alarming many around him with his terrible ravings. Just now, however, he had a short interval of consciousness and was able to recognise his school-fellow, though he did not at first know Mr. Hervey, taking him for the clergyman.

'I don't want 'ee,' sir, he began; 'I aint agoing to die yet, so please go away; it's enough to make a fellow die, to have the parson come to him, and there's one here too, they say.'

'I'm not the clergyman, my poor lad,' said Mr. Hervey gently, taking the hot feverish hand, that would have pushed him from the bedside, had it been a little stronger. 'I'll go away, Robert, if you wish it, though Alfred and I have walked a long way to see you this afternoon; we have come hoping to find you better.'

'I'm no better, sir,' was the answer, with a groan, 'but I'm not going to die; I'm glad you aint the clergyman.'

Mr. Hervey sighed. 'A clergyman will not make you die, Bob,' he said presently; 'life and death are in God's hands only. Shall I pray God to spare your life?'

'If you like,' answered the boy; but hardly had Mr. Hervey dropped on his knees, than the delirium returned with all its wild ravings, and the master rose, taking Alfred's hand as he said, 'We can pray for him at home, Morgan; God grant that he may soon pray for himself!'

Alfred brushed away a tear as he turned away from his school-fellow, and Mr. Hervey stopped to ask the nurse what hope the doctors entertained of the wretched boy's recovery.

'Very little,' was the sad answer; 'they mean to try amputation this evening, as the only chance of saving his life. They say it is the worst case of the kind that has come into the hospital for years; those great heavy cart-wheels seem to have regularly *crushed* the poor fellow, not to speak of what the horses did too. Ah! it's a sad, sad lot for him, sir, come what may; but if he was my own, I think I'd rather see him in his coffin, than lying there, suffering as he does now, or losing his limbs, as he will have

to dō before nightfall, *if he lives till then*,' added the woman, with a sigh.

Her hearers were silent for a few minutes, and then Mr. Hervey inquired if Fielding had had much delirium.

'It comes on very suddenly,' replied the nurse; 'he seems sensible for a while, then the pain seems to take him again, and he gives way to such language, that your blood would run cold to hear him. Oh, it's downright terrible to hear a boy like that swear as he does, lying at death's door, and using oaths he may have to answer for the very next moment!'

'It is indeed terrible,' said the schoolmaster; 'but may we not say that of all swearers?'

'Very true,' said the woman, and then added, 'but what surprises me in this poor thing is, that when he's delirious, he often talks so much about the church, wishing he was there like, when, perhaps, one of those awful oaths is hardly out of his mouth!'

'I knew Alfred wanted to get in the choir!' muttered Fielding, who had evidently, though unconscious, caught a part of the conversation.

'There! he's off again,' said the nurse; 'just you listen!' (Little need to say that to Alfred, who was only too eager to catch all that was likely to relate to himself and his great wish!) 'He weren't good enough though,' continued the patient, 'and I told him I could sing better than he,—so I can, too.'

Then followed a feeble attempt at a chant, which soon failed, and the muttering went on again.

'What a jolly fight we'd have had, if that old *peeler* hadn't stopped us! But I *can* sing; yes, and I *will*, some day!'

I will not, however, prolong this sad scene, and dwell on the sufferings Fielding had to endure, or his fierce ravings so terrible to hear; but I will only say that he did survive his accident, though before another sun had set, he was a hopeless cripple!

CHAPTER VII.

BOB DISCHARGED.

IT was a dark foggy morning in November when Bob left the infirmary for his miserable home, and I think he was rather sorry (in spite of all he said to the contrary) to leave the place where he had been so kindly tended during many weeks of weary suffering.

Mr. Barrow, as well as Mr. Hervey, had often visited him, and both had earnestly endeavoured to lead him to a sense of gratitude for the loving Mercy that had spared his life, and granted him yet a little while longer to learn repentance; but not one sign of feeling did the unhappy boy exhibit, beyond once saying that he 'wished he had left off going to school, as mother wanted, and gone out to get his

bread, because then he would not have got run over.'

Why he had suddenly taken into his head such a fit of school-going, Bob would not explain. He naturally felt ashamed to reveal his reason, which, however, I daresay you have guessed by this time.

Determined to spite Alfred Morgan, for having gained favour where *he* had failed, he set himself to work out a revenge. His plans were not fully formed when, by his jealous and bullying spirit, he had aroused Alfred's anger, and led to the outbreak which had caused his school-fellow's exclusion from the choir. Exulting in his success thus far, Fielding then laboured really hard to earn the post of honour which Morgan had forfeited, hoping that by adhering to his false statements, his share in Alfred's disgrace might never come to light.

In vain did his mother try, sometimes coaxing and oftener threats, to induce the wilful boy to take his proper share in supporting the family; but no, the evil determination was stronger in his heart than aught else; and Robert was glorying secretly in the hope of so appearing to improve, that he might be

elected to fill the next vacancy that occurred in the choir.

For a time his deceit seemed to answer, and he got much credit for his well-doing; but what followed might have been related almost in the words of the Psalmist, 'The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him.—I have seen the wicked in great power. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.—The end of the wicked shall be cut off.'

On this particular morning, Mr. Barrow addressed a few word to the boys, on the subject of their school-fellow's accident and wonderful escape from death. He tried to draw their attention to what had struck him, in the only confession of his fault which Bob had yet been led to make, that, had he obeyed his mother's wishes, perhaps his present sad lot might have been averted.

'And now,' concluded Mr. Barrow, 'what I want is for each boy here, to ask in his daily prayers that God will bless this affliction to poor Fielding, that by means of it, he may learn to seek the gracious Saviour he has so long slighted. And I want you all to join me now in a short prayer for your school-fellow. You

know we have a sweet promise about prayers which are offered by two or three who are gathered together in Christ's name.'

The words were few, and simple enough for the youngest to understand; and as the boys rose from their knees, there were not many who at that moment did not feel a desire that Robert Fielding might be saved.

Mr. Barrow was going to see the poor cripple on leaving the school, and, as on a former occasion, when his road lay through the same streets, he made Alfred Morgan his companion, much to the boy's delight.'

Their conversation was, naturally enough, more about Robert Fielding than anything else, and Mr. Barrow begged Alfred not to forget his school-fellow.

'If you are really in earnest yourself,' he said, 'I am sure you must be anxious about Fielding's well-doing. Try now to be better friends with him than you used to be; and where you *can* say "a word in season" to make him think, or to help him on, do. Boys have more influence over each other than men often have over them. Have you been to see him at all?'

'Once, sir, when he was in the infirmary,' answered Alfred; 'he has only come out to-day. I want to be friends with him if I can, but it seems very difficult.'

Alfred had long felt his old shyness of Mr. Barrow return in all its force, but their present conversation seemed to have removed it; and he ventured ere long, to ask whether the clergyman had become better pleased of late with his efforts to do right, and great was his joy on hearing that his steady perseverance in well-doing had been observed. With a few kind words of advice to persevere for Jesus' sake in the 'strength which He supplies,' Mr. Barrow parted from the boy, and entered Fielding's wretched home to pay his intended visit.

Our little friend hastened in, to tell all the day's news, as usual, to mother and Clara; and he went to bed that night very happy in the knowledge of Mr. Barrow's approval, and less able than ever to stifle one little hope that still lay in a corner of his heart, that he might yet obtain the prize he had lost; and you will be glad to hear that before long he *did* regain it, for Mr. Smith found two of the boys so very irregular in their attendance at the practising, that it

was of no use their remaining in the choir, so Alfred was once more elected to fill one of the vacancies.

He was not quite so elated at his success this second time, for the remembrance of his previous failure kept him humble; but you may be sure that he felt very happy indeed as he told the good news at home, and received 'mother's' ready sympathy; while Clara and Johnny were filled with delight, at the dignity of having their 'big brother' numbered among the choristers.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD ENEMIES BECOME FRIENDS.

ALFRED did not forget Bob Fielding, and soon tried to get more friendly with him; but it seemed likely to prove hard work, for Bob was sulky, and his mother's ill temper was as much as Alfred could bear civilly. He would often have given up the attempt, had he not tried to remember how very much more our blessed Saviour had borne in the world, that He might work our salvation for us, and leave us 'an example that we should follow his steps.' Should *he*, then, be stopped in his endeavours with Bob, by just a few cold looks and sharp words? So he went bravely on with his good work, running in now and then to tell Fielding little bits of school gossip, or to offer books borrowed

from the school library, and which he had leave to lend him; but, as I have said, he found it hard work to attempt anything like a friendship.

One day, not long after Alfred had been received into the choir, he ran in to his surly neighbour with the news of some piece of fun that he thought might amuse him, when, to his surprise, he found Bob in tears, while his mother was storming at him, in one of her frequent fits of passion, and bustling about the dirty little room, backwards and forwards between the fire and cupboard, at times nearly pushing her helpless son off his low seat, as she brushed angrily past him.

'What be *you* come in for?' she called out to Alfred as he entered; 'as if I hadn't got enough to do with one torment of a boy as does nothing; you be come to help in that same job! Be off, I say!'

'Oh, yes, I'll be off,' answered Alfred, good-temperedly, as he stopped a moment to help the woman to lift a heavy pot which she seemed to find some difficulty in taking off the fire; 'I only came to have a chat with Bob. But look here, Mrs. Fielding, if we're both in your way, suppose you let him come along with me for a bit, my mother isn't so

busy as you to-day, and I know she won't mind his coming in.'

'I'll let him, sure enough,' answered Mrs. Fielding; 'not that he troubles much about what I *let* him do, though (the scamp!) or he wouldn't be as he is now; for what did I always want to *let* him do? Earn his bread like a boy of his age ought to, when bad off like us! But it was always, "Oh, no, mother, give us the twopence for school, this week. I'll earn a lot some day;" and look at him now, will he ever earn his *salt*, think you? not to talk of his bread.'

'Oh, Mrs. Fielding,' said Alfred, 'I think Bob can do ever so much, though he *is* lame; and I don't think,' he added, with a feeling of indignation at this rough treatment of Bob's misfortune, 'I don't think it's kind to keep on scolding him so because he's crippled. You are sorry, ain't you, Bob, for having been disobedient?'

An oath from the boy, and a sound box on the ear from the mother, was the only answer Alfred received; and for a moment he felt very angry, but, trying to conquer the rising passion, he gently went towards his companion, and assisted him to move from his

chair; it was rather hard work, for Bob had hardly tried to use his crutches yet, disliking to own to himself, and prove to all the world, how helpless he, the once strong and sturdy youth, had become. Alfred kindly gave all the help he could, and tried to shield the poor boy from observation, as they passed from one house to the other. The two boys were soon seated side by side, in front of Mrs. Morgan's tidy little hearth, and Alfred felt a pleasant feeling of satisfaction, as he thanked God in his heart for having helped him to conquer the anger lately excited, and which, had he yielded to it, would have spoilt the enjoyment he was then feeling, in having a better chance of 'bringing Bob round,' as he expressed it. Mrs. Morgan brought out to amuse the boys, a much-treasured scrap-book, which had been presented to her by some little girls she had once nursed: and in a short time all traces of Bob's tears had left his face, and both boys were merrily laughing over the funny pictures, or admiring, and wondering about the graver ones.

Little Johnny was looking on with wide-opened eyes; he was at first rather afraid of coming too near Bob, for he still remembered how the boy had

frightened him on the night that Alfred had spent in the station-house; and then again his changed expression startled the timid child: but by-and-bye, as he saw there was no present cause for fear, the little fellow tried to join in the conversation, and, looking up in Bob's face, he began, as little children often do, to say what was uppermost in his own mind, without its having any connexion with what the others were saying—

'Do you know I'm going to church next Sunday?'

'Are you?' said Fielding; 'haven't you ever been before?'

'Yes; but not for a long time, and then I used to sit on mother's knee all the while, and once I talked out loud, and she took me home; but *now*, Bob, I'm not going to sit on anybody's lap, I'm going to take care of Clara, because Alfred's going to be a singer, and can't go with her.'

Bob started. 'Going to be a singer! Are you really, Alfred?' he asked.

Alfred looked confused,—he had not liked to tell Bob, rather fearing how the news might be received; but to his great relief the boy did not seem to mind, he only looked absently into the fire, and then said,

'When were you chosen, Alfred? Do tell me all about it.'

'On Tuesday,' answered Alfred; 'I've been to two practisings, one on Tuesday, and one last night; but I haven't sung in church yet.'

'I'm very glad you've got in at last,' said Bob quietly; 'you deserved it, Alfred.'

Alfred looked very pleased. 'Are you *really* glad, Bob?' he asked; 'I was afraid you wouldn't be, so I never said anything about it.'

'It was my fault you were kept out before,' continued Fielding; 'and, Alfred,' he said, with something very like a sob, 'I tried hard after that, to keep you from ever having another chance. Did you know it?'

'I once fancied you did,' said Alfred; 'but never mind now, Bob, all that's over, and I want for us to be friends.'

'I'll be friends if *you* will,' answered Fielding.

And thus the two who had so often quarrelled, became warm friends, and many were the times that they sat together in Mrs. Morgan's neat room; and Bob soon learnt to agree with most other people, that Alfred was right in loving his stepmother so deeply,

for she proved a real warm friend to him, the poor cripple; and none the less so, that in a kind, gentle way, she tried to help him in overcoming his many faults, beginning at once to check the bad language he was so much in the habit of using. It was a difficult thing for Bob to break himself off this, but to please his kind friend, he did *try;* and he also tried to listen more to all the instruction the clergyman and his Sunday-school teacher were anxious to impart, and I hope it was not wasted upon him, for, in after years, Robert Fielding was often heard to say that he blessed God more for taking away his limbs than for any other event that had befallen him.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHRISTMAS-TREE.

LITTLE Johnny fully enjoyed his church-going on the following Sunday, when Clara was intrusted to his sole charge during Morning Service, for their mother could seldom attend church until the evening. Poor Bob Fielding was there too; he had begged Alfred to go with him to the school, which his new friend gladly did, but was obliged to leave him to the care of another boy, when going into church, for the choristers had to leave a few minutes before the other scholars, Mr. Barrow liking to meet them in the vestry, where he always made a short prayer before service.

As the singers took their places in the chancel, Alfred felt almost in a dream; his great wish was at

last fulfilled, and he could hardly realize it. He glanced round for a moment to look for his brother and sister; yes, there they were, at no great distance, and poor Bob sitting with them, his face wearing a saddened, serious expression, so different from the Bob of former days, that Alfred scarcely knew whether to cry or feel glad; but as he looked away from the little group, to find his places in the Prayer-book, his eye caught sight of the words beautifully illuminated on the opposite wall, 'Let thy saints sing with joyfulness;' and he felt as if they were an answer to his doubt, telling him that this day should be one of joy and thanksgiving to God.

Thus did this, and many another Sabbath pass happily away with Alfred Morgan; he did nothing now to lose his character or place, and all seemed prospering with him; Fielding and he continued friends, though there were occasionally things in which they did not quite agree. The poor cripple was now so great a favourite at his neighbour's, that it was no longer with a sigh that Alfred braved Mrs. Fielding's peculiar temper, for the sake of fetching her son to spend whole evenings with him.

Christmas was drawing near, and all the scholars

at St. Mark's were eagerly looking forward to the treat and prize-giving, which always took place at that time. This year Mr. Barrow had promised a Christmas-tree, which was not to be exhibited until all the prizes had been given.

What a happy gathering assembled on that cold winter's night! Upwards of a hundred happy little beings were waiting with excitement, to see the beautiful tree, laden with fruit so different from most. Alfred, of course, was there; with his little brother on one side, holding Clara fast by the hand, for nothing would ever make him give up the charge of her to any one else, now that he was fairly established as her guardian.

Tea over, Mr. Barrow called out the names of the best girls and boys in each class of the Sunday school, and presented them with the rewards they had earned. Clara, though not one of the two highest in her class, had done so well, for a poor little blind girl, that everybody thought she deserved a reward, and she, therefore, received a pretty story-book, which Alfred was to read to her. When *his* turn came, Alfred, who was now high up in the school, was given a handsome Church Service; he had not been long enough in the choir



"What a happy gathering assembled on that cold winter's night! Upwards of a hundred happy little beings."
ALFRED AND HIS MOTHER, Page 82.

to receive the usual gift of five shillings, but he received *one*, which, being the first he had ever possessed, he looked at over and over again, and admired even more than his nice prize with its bright gilt clasps.

'Is that a real silver shilling, Alfred?' said little Johnny, peeping into his brother's hand. 'What will you do with it? Will it buy a great many nice things?'

'Oh yes,' said Alfred; 'but I don't know yet how I am going to spend it; I must think it all over, you know, Johnny. Won't it be grand when *you* are big enough to gain prizes and have shillings of your own, to do what you like with?'

'Yes; when I am big enough, I shall be a singer like you, Alfred, and then every Sunday in church, I shall sing "Once in Royal David's City," because Clara and I are so fond of it.'

'Oh, but we mustn't sing just what we like,' said Alfred with a smile; 'Mr. Barrow always chooses the hymns. But hush now, Johnny, there's a good boy; I think somebody is going to speak.'

The prizes being all distributed, the children were marshalled by two and two into the girls' schoolroom,

where the tall Christmas-tree had been planted. As they walked along, all joined in the joyous hymn—

'Come, sing with holy gladness,'

and by the time it was ended, a happy little throng stood round the pretty tree. What eager eyes watched the picking of the pleasant fruit! there is not another tree which bears such a strange variety of fruits, as the Christmas-tree. Mr. and Mrs. Barrow began with the younger children, and our friend Johnny's turn soon came. He had not been long enough at school to deserve a prize, but every child was to have a present from the tree; and when he had drawn a ticket out of a bag held by Mrs. Barrow, and had shown its number, he was given a smart ball, which was marked with the same figure.

'Oh, Alfred, just look!' cried the little fellow, as he ran back to where his brother and sister were standing; 'I've got such a *beautiful* ball, with red, and green, and yellow all painted on it; and it is so soft; only squeeze it!'

Alfred, of course, admired the ball as much as Johnny could desire; and Clara, too, tried to understand its beauties, and then it was restored to the

little boy's hands, and affectionately hugged for the rest of the evening.

I can hardly describe the scene which soon followed; the noise was *something* like what you may hear in the Zoological Gardens; for toy cats, dogs, and birds were squeaking in chorus, in addition to which, small trumpets were sounding, and occasional notes heard from accordions, while all the small owners of these treasures were chattering merrily over their new possessions. Alfred got a famous knife; poor Bob was given a story-book, which would help to amuse some weary hours of lonely helplessness; and blind Clara was the happy receiver of one of the accordions. After these nice presents had been duly admired and examined, somebody proposed a game, and the schoolroom was soon the scene of noisy play at 'Hunt the Slipper,' 'Drop the Handkerchief,' and the many other games which girls and boys enjoy so heartily; until, at eight o'clock, Mr. and Mrs. Barrow thought it time for these little people to be going home; so, after giving 'three times three' for the kind providers of their enjoyment, they stood up in order, to sing the pretty Christmas hymn—'Once

in Royal David's city,' after which they all
persed.

In after-times Alfred's thoughts often went back
this happy evening, and he remembered how he
stood with Johnny's little hand clasped in his,
heard his baby voice joining Clara's, in their favou
carol, which put such sweet thoughts into their min
of the coming Christmas-day, the birthday of t
kind Saviour 'Who came down to earth from heav
that 'whosoever believeth in him should not peri
but have everlasting life.'

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE next sun that rose smiled on this glorious birthday, and Alfred was awoke by Clara and Johnny, asking in loud eager voices what hymns would be sung in church, and whether he had seen all the pretty decorations he had said there would be. No, Alfred had not seen them, for they had been put up the previous morning only, so he could give no description of them; but he could say what hymns were chosen, and the little things were delighted to hear that they were some of their especial favourites—'Hark, the Herald Angels sing,' 'Christians, awake,' and 'Once in Royal David's city,' which latter Mr. Barrow had chosen particularly for the younger portion of his congregation.

All three children went to church, and Mrs. Morgan managed to accompany them, having determined to risk taking Dicky, as a neighbour had offered to look after her small amount of Christmas cooking.

It was a happy service that morning, but when is it not on Christmas Day, when carefully conducted and thoroughly joined in? The decorations were quite tasteful enough to satisfy Johnny's grandest imagination, and all returned home with glad hearts. Many days' economy had gone towards providing the nicely cooked piece of mutton and plain plum-pudding which were then set on Mrs. Morgan's table, and I need not say how much both were enjoyed by the children. Their father, too, was at dinner with them, and for once seemed good-tempered and *sober;* but immediately dinner was over, he started for his old haunt, the public-house in the next street.

'Oh, Richard!' begged his poor wife, 'don't go to the Rose and Crown to-day; do, just this once, stay, and let us have a merry Christmas together, with our little ones.'

He hesitated an instant, as he looked on the happy group before him; but alas! his evil passion had its way, and muttering something about 'having a merrier

Christmas where he was bound,' the wretched man left his home. Ah! never again would he have a chance of spending a happy Christmas in the home he valued so little! 'He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'

Mrs. Morgan, though with a heavy heart, set about amusing the three elder children with the few games they could play in the small room; they were happier without the father; but she (poor soul!) felt little enjoyment, in the knowledge that her husband was spending, in rioting and drunkenness, the joyful day which tells so especially of a Saviour's word to a lost world.

Alfred soon thought of fetching his lame friend to share some of the pleasure he was not likely to get at home—and a very happy afternoon they spent, though the games were rather quieter than some of Alfred's favourites. But tea-time was drawing near, and the fun had to be set aside for a while, as mother was obliged to be busy boiling the kettle, and cutting bread and slices of a nice currant cake, which kind Mrs. Hervey had sent the day before; and Alfred's attention was fully taken up with baby, who had

become very clamorous at the sight of the dainties which were being produced.

'I wish your father would come home to his tea,' sighed Mrs. Morgan; 'we ought all to be together on a Christmas Day; don't you think so, dears?'

'Yes,' answered the two elder children, but I fancy their hearts answered '*no*,' for there was an immediate silence, and the little faces looked very grave.

'Perhaps,' continued their mother, taking no notice of the doubtful looks, 'if one of you was to run over, and beg him to come in to such a good tea, he might think it worth while.'

'I'll go,' said Alfred directly, seeing how much his mother wished a messenger, and setting Dicky down, he reached his hat, and would have gone at once, had not Mrs. Morgan stopped him, saying—

'Stay, my boy, I don't know how I can spare you, for Dicky seems as if he wouldn't be quiet with the others; Johnny, dear, can't *you* manage to go with Clara? you've often passed the Rose and Crown, and you won't be frightened to go in when she's with you, I know.'

'Come along, Clara,' said the willing little fellow; 'but, mother,' he said as she gave him his hat, 'can't I have my *best* cap to-day? it's Christmas Day, you



"'Father,' began the little maiden gently, 'mother wants y
come home to tea; please come, won't you?'"—ALFRED ANI
MOTHER, Page 91.

know, and I should like to wear my new cap with the plaid band.'

'Oh! very well,' answered his mother with a smile; '"Christmas comes but once a year," so I suppose I must spoil you this once; but make haste, for I am putting the tea into the pot now.'

Away went the children, pleased at being intrusted with so important a message, yet half frightened at the thought of entering the public-house; but they had no occasion to go as far, for just at the corner of Bridge Lane stood their father, leaning against the railings of the bridge, while he talked with a comrade, who was standing on the top of a flight of steps which led down to the river.

'There's father,' whispered Johnny, '*you* speak, won't you, Clara? I feel afraid to, 'cause he looks as if he had been drinking.'

'Father,' began the little maiden gently, 'mother wants you to come home to tea; please come, won't you?'

'It's such a nice tea,' put in Johnny, gaining courage.

An oath was the only answer they received, and the other man, moving towards them, said, not un-

kindly, 'Don't come bothering him now, don't you see he's drunk; it's no good talking to him about his tea, he don't want it; you'd better go home again to your mother.'

But Clara made a fresh attempt, and going nearer, said sweetly, '*Please* come home now, father; it's Christmas Day, and mother wants you so much!'

'BE OFF!' shouted her father, with a fresh oath, and stretching out his hand to push the unoffending children from him, he stumbled against little Johnny, and fell headlong down the steps into the river below, dragging both children with him in his fall. Clara was hastily caught by his companion, and thrown somewhat roughly out of harm's way, before she, in her blindness, could fully understand what had happened.

A crowd soon assembled round the spot, and Morgan was quickly rescued by one of the number; but Johnny—where was *he?*

It was some few minutes before it was clearly known that a child, as well as a man, had fallen into the water, and then he had already sunk twice; it seemed a long while before he rose for the third time, but he was then immediately drawn out, by a strong man who had leaped on to a boat from the steps,

and who sprang hastily on shore, to place his little burden by the side of the senseless, half-drowned man, who had killed his own child—for Johnny was lifeless.

The new little Christmas cap was found floating on the water, and on being picked up, was tenderly placed on the child's cold breast by one of the by-standers, who remarked that 'the poor mother would like to have all that had belonged to him.'

Clara, pale and trembling (but too much startled to weep), was led home to break the dreadful tidings to the waiting party there. Once within the walls, she easily found the way to her mother's arms, and clasping her tightly round the neck, in a few hurried, gasping words, told her mournful tale. She had hardly finished when the men came to the door, bringing their sad load.

I will not dwell on the grief that followed, nor the season of nursing, which lasted, until a bad wound in the head, that Richard Morgan had received in falling against the steps, resulted in his death. Unconscious, to the last, he knew not here what his drunken fit had caused; but can we think he was always ignorant, and that on passing to another state, he never felt the Murderer's doom?

CHAPTER XI.

ALFRED LEAVES SCHOOL.

IT was one of the customs in St. Mark's School that when a scholar was buried, a few of the elder boys carried the coffin to the cemetery, while others were chosen to follow. So, on the Sunday after his little brother's death, Alfred begged to be one of the bearers, and it was not until he stood at the open grave, looking down upon the tiny coffin being lowered, as the solemn yet glorious words were read which speak of our sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection, that Alfred realized that his brother was indeed taken from them all; that the kind Shepherd who loves the lambs, had gathered this one into His 'everlasting arms.' He

remembered how heartily Johnny had sung in his favourite hymn,

> 'And our eyes at last shall see Him,
> Through His own redeeming love;'

and how little he, or any of them, had then thought that very soon he would be seeing his Saviour, and praising Him, not in these words, but in that new song which none can learn 'but those redeemed from the earth.'

The little one was sorely missed by those he had left behind in the lowly home; it was long ere Clara could be persuaded to attend school without her faithful guide; or Alfred check the tears that often fell, as he looked on Johnny's empty seat in church, and thought that the place which had known him but a short time ago, would never know him more.

Yes, all this is sad to feel and to hear, but there is a brighter side to the picture; a brighter side that I would describe in the few words, 'His gain is our loss;' and in time Alfred learnt to feel this; and so did the loving mother, who at first often longed for another glance at the dear little one, so suddenly snatched away from her.

'The mother gave in tears and pain
The flowers she most did love;
She knew she should see them all again,
In the fields of light above.'

And now came the time that Alfred used to desire so eagerly, the time of leaving school; but, like many of our cherished wishes, as its fulfilment drew near, it did not look so charming as in the distance. Not that Alfred was discontented, but you know he had been doing so much better at school, that its duties were less irksome than in former days. Mrs. Morgan had originally intended keeping him at school until he was thirteen; but the funerals of her husband and child had been such a heavy expense, that she felt it necessary for Alfred to join his earnings to hers, for the family support; besides which, there was no willing little Johnny now, to be eyes to Clara and a nurse to Dicky, while their mother was out at work; so that she had to remain at home more than formerly. Through Mr. Barrow's influence, Alfred obtained a situation as errand-boy in a respectable grocer's shop, where he had plenty of running about to do until past eight o'clock every evening; he still remained in the choir, and on the nights when there was no practising, he and Bob Fielding attended the

night-school at St. Mark's, where they not only kept up what they had previously learnt, but by degrees added a little more to it, so that by the time Alfred was twelve, and Bob fourteen, the dunces of two years ago, took the two highest places amongst Mr. Hervey's scholars. Perhaps you are wondering why Fielding continued a scholar, after all that had happened. I had nearly forgotten to tell you that he was fortunate enough to secure the post of 'cashier' in a linen-draper's shop close by, which was work he soon learned to like, for he was rather quick at figures, and was not expected to change his place at the desk (except for meals) until the shop was closed.

One fine summer evening, Alfred was hurrying home as fast as he could from his day's work, for Mrs. Morgan had undertaken some charing for a lady who lived a few miles out of the town, and had begged her eldest boy to come straight home, and as early as possible, as the friendly neighbour who had arranged to look in upon her little household could not remain through the evening.

'It is rather disagreeable,' thought Alfred, as he

hastened through the streets, 'to have to see after those little ones, just to-night when Mr. Barrow is to give a lecture at our school! I almost wish I hadn't promised mother to go home, because then she might have asked Bob, or somebody, instead of me; but then, I suppose, it would have been quite as bad for them as me; so I mustn't grumble, only I do hope Dicky won't squall, like he did the last time I put him to bed.'

'Here! boy, stop a bit!' called a voice near Alfred, as he ran along, jostling many passers-by in a way that was certainly not polite; but we must excuse him, as his mind was so full of keeping the promise he had made, that he was taking no notice of anything else; but this voice startled him, and looking round, he saw that it came from a gentleman who was seated in a dog-cart, and appeared anxious to alight, but afraid to trust his horse to his own devices.

'Come, my boy,' he said, having attracted Alfred's attention, 'I'll give give you a shilling, if you will hold my horse while I go in here. But what's the matter? You look as if you doubted my word;—

there's the shilling,' he added, laughing, as he drew one from his pocket; 'and when I come out again, you shall have it.'

'Please, sir, how long shall you be?' asked Alfred, hesitating.

'How long? I can't quite say; perhaps an hour, more or less.'

'Then I'm afraid, sir,' said Alfred, quietly, 'that I can't stop; if it was five minutes or so, perhaps I could, but not an hour, I'm very sorry, sir.'

'Bless the boy!' cried the gentleman, in amazement. 'I can't think what boys of the present day are coming to! I should have thought a shilling enough to tempt you from an hour's play; but I suppose shillings are as plentiful with you as marbles, eh?'

'No indeed, sir,' answered Alfred; 'it's not many of them that come nigh me. If it was only *play* you were keeping me from, I'd stop, sir, and welcome, for sixpence; but to-night my time's not all my own, for my mother's out at work in the country, and won't be back till nine, or half-past, and I promised her I'd go home and see to everything for her—she's reckoning on it, don't you see, sir? so I can't stop.

I don't even think I ought for five or ten minutes; but I know a boy as would like to come, I daresay, and I 'll run home and send him directly, if you like, sir, for it 's close by.'

'Well, if that 's the case, I must not try to keep you,' said the gentleman, 'for it 's every lad's duty to keep a promise, and to obey his mother. I should be the last man in England to hinder you; so run off and send me your friend as quick as you can. Good-night.'

Alfred ran off, feeling rather sorry that so easy an opportunity of earning a shilling had been lost; but he felt sure that he was doing right, and that 'mother' would never have undertaken her day's job so far off, if she had not depended on *his* being at home as soon as he could. So he was not long in recovering himself, and running in to a little neighbour, who lodged in the same house, he sent him, glad and happy, to hold the horse; while he went in himself to undress his baby brother. Fortunately, Dicky was in a very good temper that night, and instead of tears, he treated his brother and sister to a variety of strange antics, and many attempts at new words he had never before tried to speak,

and which sounded so funny, that both children were kept in a state of high merriment, until at last the little fellow suddenly dropped asleep; and then there was time for Alfred to tell Clara all about his adventure with the gentleman and horse.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

THE next afternoon, while Alfred was at his work, Mrs. Morgan was surprised by a strange step on her stairs, and then came a loud knock at the door, which she speedily answered, and there found standing, a tall gentleman, inquiring in a pleasant voice, whether he had come to the right house to find Mrs. Morgan.

'Yes, sir,' she answered, with a smile, 'and here I be; will you please step in and take a seat?'

'Thank you,' he said, coming in. 'I came to have a talk about your boy, whom I met last evening, and was much pleased to find one of the very few, who care to carry out a mother's wishes. I suppose he told you of our meeting?'

'Yes, sir,' said Mrs. Morgan, 'he's a good boy, and one, I trust, will do well, for he've begun at the right end by trying to please God first, so we have good reason to believe He won't leave him to want any good thing.'

'Just so,' replied the stranger. 'What I came for is this, Mrs. Morgan. I found out your son's name and address from the boy he sent to hold my horse instead of himself, and I found out a good deal more, too, about him and you all; but as I am in a hurry to drive back to Dartworth, which will take me a good hour and a half, I can't wait to tell you all I know. But I have just looked in, to ask if Alfred would like a better place than the one he is in now.'

'Why, yes, sir,' answered Mrs. Morgan, smiling; 'there's not many who don't like to better themselves, if they get a chance. May I make so bold as to ask whether you know of anything likely to suit him? He's in a grocer's shop now, sir, as errand-boy.'

'So I hear, and earning three shillings a week, which is very good for a boy like him. Well, I think I can find him a still better place in the general shop at Dartworth, where I live; for it was only

yesterday that I happened to go in for something, and Mr. Jenkins, the master, knowing I was coming over here, asked me to inquire of any clergyman I knew, for a steady boy who would suit his place. He wants one to help a little in the shop and to run errands. He will give four-and-sixpence per week and his keep, to a quick, respectable lad, which is much better than what your boy is earning now. I was going to ask my friend, Mr. Barrow, the rector of St. Mark's, whether there was any decent boy in his school that would do, for Jenkins' is a place that's not met with very often; but, you see, as I have fallen in with Alfred, I need not go further, if you think it worth while to let him apply for the place. He may expect an increase of wages, too, if he remains.'

'Oh, indeed, sir, if you will kindly speak a good word for my boy, I shall be very grateful to you for thinking of him,' answered Mrs. Morgan; adding presently, 'we know Mr. Barrow too, sir. This is in his parish, and I'm sure he'd give Alfred a good character, for he has known him years. Alfred was brought up in St. Mark's School, and goes there now at nights, and he sings in the church choir; and for

them as knows how very particular Mr. Barrow is, that of itself is a kind of character, sir.'

'Yes, it is,' answered the gentleman; 'and if his present master will speak well of him too, I have little doubt that Jenkins will take the lad. You talk it over with Alfred, and let me know what you both decide upon after having well considered the matter. And now I must be off, or I shall get home too late to dinner. This is my address,' he added, writing on a card the following :—

JAMES HOLDEN, Esq.,
DARTWORTH PARK.

'Good-morning, Mrs. Morgan. There 's a shilling for Alfred, and if ever he comes to Dartworth, you may be sure I 'll keep an eye upon him.'

What good news this was for Alfred when he came home that night! Of course there was but one opinion in the matter, and he wrote a neat letter in his best handwriting, to tell his new friend how glad he and his mother would be, if Mr. Jenkins kindly took him into his service.

A very few weeks saw Alfred in his new place, and Mrs. Morgan comfortably settled in the lodge at

Dartworth Park. And now, though some twelve years have passed away since then, if you should ever chance to be in the village of Dartworth, you will probably notice a large, clean, general shop at the corner of '*the* street;' and should you want anything in the 'grocery department,' go in, and you will be waited upon by a young man, who just bears sufficient resemblance to our acquaintance of former days, to be recognised as Alfred Morgan. In his pretty wife, who is quietly presiding over the goods on the other side of the shop, you will, perhaps, trace some likeness to the schoolmaster's little daughter, Lucy, while in the crippled man seated behind a desk, and making out all the shop accounts, you will see Alfred's most valued assistant, Robert Fielding.

Mrs. Morgan still lives in the pretty lodge, and will be only too happy to open the park gates to you at any time and show you some of the grounds; and she is sure to point out to your especial notice a fine boy, who is helping in the garden, and whose present ambition is, that he may some day become Mr. Holden's head gardener. This is Dicky.

And then, if you should accept Mrs. Morgan's in-

vitation to stay and have tea at the lodge, you will see blind Clara knitting busily—or playing some airs on a good concertina, which has now superseded the accordion, given her years ago at the happy Christmas treat.

After tea, if it be fine, they will be sure to take you again to 'the shop,' for they often pay a visit there, after the shutters are put up, and the day's work is done.

Being old friends, you and Alfred will, of course, talk over his success in having gradually risen from errand-boy to shopman, then to foreman, and lastly, to being himself the prosperous master of all. But Alfred will not, like many people, attribute all his prosperity to 'good luck,' or to his own cleverness—he will merely end his tale by saying reverently—

'God is faithful, who hath promised.—Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you!'

THE CROWN OF THORNS.

AN ALLEGORY.

BY

KATHARINE E. MAY.

THE CROWN OF THORNS:

A DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

'Young and erring travellers, we
All our dangers do not know.'
MERCER'S *Church Psalter and Hymn Book.*

'Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
His tender, last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter, bequeathed
With us to dwell.'—*Hymns Ancient and Modern.*

I SAW in my dream a lovely and spacious garden, in which, like unto that garden of old, there grew everything 'that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.' I noticed there groups of many children plucking the sweet flowers, eating of the luscious fruits, or sporting carelessly beneath the shade of spreading trees, planted for shelter in the hottest parts.

Out of the many little ones I watched, three fair children especially attracted my attention; they were a sister and two brothers, and as they were nearer to me than the rest, I could distinctly hear all that passed amongst them.

'Oh, it is all so beautiful! so beautiful!' the little maiden was repeating half to herself, as she called the gay flowers which grew in her path.

'Yes, Avice,' said the elder boy, who, though a little in advance of his sister, had overheard her; 'it is beautiful for *you*, I doubt not, but see here! this large thorn that is in my hand seems likely to tear it to pieces, and though I certainly gather many beautiful flowers, yet this thorn pains me sorely; it will not come out, pull as I will,—and, Avice, I think the flowers and fruit *you* are picking are better and larger than these.'

'Then, Urbane, come back to this place,' answered the child, 'I will change with either you or Ira.'

'I have tried to return,' said the boy, 'but something always draws me on, and still *on*. I can neither stop nor go back: do not *you* find it so, Avice? you are not in the same spot as when I last looked at you.'

'Am I not?' she said; 'but I like this quite as well, it is so beautiful!'

'Yes, *but* for this thorn,' again said Urbane, looking down at his bleeding hand.

Then I saw that they suddenly came upon another group which I had not yet observed, a crowd of children standing round a venerable man, who was talking in grave, earnest tones; and as Avice and her brothers drew near, I heard him telling these little ones much of their own history, which, it seems, they had not known before. He told them that the lovely place through which they wandered was only the road to a more beautiful abode, where they had an Elder Brother living and reigning a mighty King, who was waiting to welcome them with joy to the Home His love had prepared.

'Once,' continued the speaker, 'His feet trod this same garden, wherein you now rove; and, though a great and powerful King, 'whose power no creature is able to resist,' many who should have been His loyal subjects, said in derisive anger, "We will not have this man to reign over us;" and these enemies laughed Him to scorn, and instead of the jewelled crown that should have adorned His gracious brow, they set upon it a crown of thorns!'

'But does He wear it now?' asked Avice.

'Nay, my little one,' answered the venerable man, 'He now wears a crown, so bright, that your eyes could not yet bear to look upon its glorious light. Other crowns too, He will one day have, and none more beautiful and precious to Him than the one which you, His little followers, are to place upon His head!'

The children looked up with wonder.

'Are *we* to make a crown?' they asked; 'but where, and how?'

And Urbane looked once more at his poor lacerated hand, and Avice on her tiny, feeble fingers, wondering how these were to weave a diadem of glory for their Royal Brother. The speaker noticed these glances, and would have explained the children's difficulty at once, had not Ira hastily asked, 'But why does our noble King need yet another crown?'

'Ah! my little one, would you grudge Him the work of your hands and of your heart? But listen, and I will tell. This garden, abounding though it does, in perfumed flowers of every hue, and luscious fruits, has nevertheless, as you go farther and farther on, difficult and dangerous paths, some of which would

take you far away from your Brother's Home, into regions where you would be lost in the outer darkness; where, instead of the joyous strains of sweet music which awaken each arrival, the only sounds heard are weeping and gnashing of teeth from those lost forlorn creatures whom the prince of those dark realms has beguiled into his kingdom. So impossible was it for any of you to escape that sad and fearful doom, instead of finding your way to His beautiful Kingdom, that your Elder Brother Himself came into this land, passed through the very roads by which you must travel, patiently toiling through briers and thickets, and nobly too, He battled with that wicked prince, who is ever anxious to draw you out of the right roads, down those which lead only to *his* dwelling, and who incited to rebellion those mistaken beings who would not have the one true King to reign over them.'

'But I see no difficult paths, nothing dangerous to fear,' said Ira incredulously; while little Avice again murmured softly, 'It is all so beautiful!'

'Yes,' said their friend, 'all beautiful, all smooth and easy, to those who have travelled such a short distance; but look, my children, at your brother

there; he has gone only a *little* farther along the road than you, and yet he has already met with a difficulty you have not experienced;' and he pointed to Urbane's bleeding hand, which now seemed to hinder him altogether from plucking the fruit or flowers, or pushing back any overhanging branches that obstructed the path.

'But why did not Urbane remain where he was at first?' asked Avice, 'and his hand would not have been wounded.'

'It is not in his power or in yours, my little maiden, to remain stationary; on, on, you must all gradually travel, but to which goal you will journey rests with yourselves. To leave no doubt as to the right road to take to His blessed home, your kind Elder Brother explored each weary path Himself; He has left many landmarks, and He has given you a letter of directions for the journey, besides which, He has graciously bequeathed a Guide, who will follow (or rather *lead*) you, unseen, safe, to your journey's end, unless, indeed, by wilful disregard of His voice, you banish Him yourselves. "Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to

the left." Turn not from that voice, "that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."'

'But the crown, the crown?' asked Ira impatiently; 'you said we were to make a crown.'

The speaker again pointed to Urbane's hand, saying, 'Of such thorns in the flesh is this fair crown to be formed, and yet it will not be a crown to pierce and wound, like the sad and painful one I mentioned; for, though that very thorn was one of those which formed the diadem placed on His head in mockery, it will, rightly used, become a brilliant ray set in a glorious crown of light. Each of you, sooner or later, will find a similar one, for all the thorns from off that wreath have been divided amongst you all, my children; some have large sharp thorns, like Urbane's, and some have very tiny ones; but each is to be covered with bright jewels which, if you seek, you will surely find on your path; and when each thorn is covered with the precious gems collected by the children of the Kingdom, only think what a glorious crown will be there, to adorn the brow of One "worthy to receive blessing, and honour, and glory, and power!" Will you not delight to add your share in turning the crown of thorns into a crown

of jewels? Shall you not rejoice to see your Br crowned with the toil of your little hands, though the thorn should sometimes have pie and wounded you for a moment?'

Urbane's face brightened at the idea, and a began to realize it, his hand became less pai Ira sought everywhere for *his* allotted thorn, made many plans as to its jewelled covering; v little Avice troubled not, but went gaily on, pluc the garden's lovely produce, for she knew her t would be found in due time; and still she murm her old refrain, 'It is all so beautiful!'

CHAPTER II.

'Yet shall to him the still small voice,
That first into his bosom found
A way, and fixed his wavering choice,
Nearest and dearest ever sound.'
Christian Year.

I HAD become so interested in these three young wanderers, that I thought I would watch their progress through the garden, to their Brother's lovely Home, and see how their thorns became meet adornments for His gracious brow.

As I watched, I saw that their kind friend was right in all he had told them; for try as they would to remain in any one pleasant spot, or to return to one they had left, by some irresistible power they were gradually drawn on, farther and farther, until they came to intricate windings, rough paths, and many

overhanging brambles, through which they could hardly force their way. And then I saw, that both Ira and little Avice had become possessed of a thorn from their Brother's crown; Ira had seen his lying upon a leaf, but how his sister's had reached her, none knew.

'I have found no jewel yet, Urbane, have *you?*' I heard Ira ask presently; 'but see, the path branches off in several directions, and, oh! I see there a large bright jewel shining; look, Urbane, it lies on yonder shrub. I will hasten thither to fetch it, and then I shall be the first of us to place a gem in our Brother's crown!'

Urbane looked, and he would gladly have turned aside, for there were many precious stones glittering in that spot; but just then a gentle voice sounded, 'Turn not aside to the right hand, nor to the left,' so he desisted from the attempt, though Ira heeded not the warning injunction, and sprang eagerly across the path in the direction of the gems, and had almost secured one, when the invisible Guide seemed to force him back, and slowly he retraced his steps, walking with a somewhat downcast air.

They had not gone many steps farther, when I saw

that Urbane found a bright and valuable jewel which hung from a low shrub he was passing; he gathered it joyfully, and went on his way, still looking all around to see if, perchance, more such treasures would meet his eye. Ira and Avice, too, on reaching that same place, found each another jewel like their brother's, and with triumphant shouts they began to cover their little thorns.

I noticed, that by degrees, the three children had got a long way from the pleasant spot where I had first perceived them; but they appeared hardly conscious of it themselves, though at each step they found their path rougher, and the bushes thicker. Urbane was the only one who seemed aware of the long distance they had travelled, and sometimes he would look back anxiously as his brother and sister passed some stone which had wellnigh cut his own foot, or he would eagerly watch them struggle through thickly-entwined branches, amidst which he had almost become entangled; he would warn them as they came to these difficulties, and often did I hear him begging that they would look carefully at their directions, and listen to the voice of the kind invisible Guide who was leading them all so gently and lovingly. Avice

would look up gratefully, and thank her brother for his thought of her; but Ira paid little heed to cautions from one who (he said) had travelled such a short distance farther, that he could not know much more of the road than himself; and without even hearkening to their Guide, he would plunge headlong through the boughs that *looked* least entangled, and pick out his way over stones that did not *seem* very sharp, and yet he got more wounds and more scratches than did either of the others; and I saw that the one jewel he had placed upon his thorn was fast gliding off, and by slow degrees it quite disappeared; yet Ira knew it not, but hastened on, regardless of all but his own plans, and the momentary pleasure of the sweet fruits that hung even on the most entangled boughs, and seemed to tempt all wayfarers to rest awhile and be refreshed. But I noticed that, eat as the boy might of these luscious dainties, he could never be satisfied, nor even thoroughly pleased with them; he would often complain of a bitter taste in his mouth, and a craving for still greater luxuries. Often and often I heard the gentle voice of the Guide urging on the little trifler.

'This is the way, walk ye in it,' I could hear Him

say to *all;* but to Ira, as he hastily turned aside, He would again and again repeat, in gentle and reproachful tones, 'Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil!'

As they journeyed on, I saw that Urbane's thorn no longer seemed the painful barb it proved before he had learned its use; for gradually it was becoming covered with the brilliant gems, that he sought and found, in the path through which he was led. Sometimes I thought he was about to tread upon a bright jewel, but it seemed as if it were pointed out to him by his invisible Companion, and then, oh! how gladly did he stoop, and, picking it up, place it on his thorn. At other times, the jewel he was told to seek, would be lying at some little distance, and the only way to procure it was by struggling through bushes and brambles growing so close together, that it was with many a wound, bruise, or fall, that he finally reached the place. But through all these difficulties he was aided by the gracious Guide whose words comforted and encouraged by turns, while He would often remind the boy of the more numerous difficulties, which his Elder Brother had encountered all alone, with a view to smooth the homeward

CHAPTER III.

'Little hearts for ever stainless,—
Little hands as pure as they,—
Little feet, by angels guided,
Never a forbidden way!
They are going—ever going—
Leaving many a lonely spot;
But 'tis Jesus who has called them—
Suffer, and forbid them not!'

Lyra Anglicana.

I NEXT observed that the three little travellers had come to a strange, dark-looking place, where no light shone near the two brothers, though their sister's tiny feet seemed treading in one radiant stream of light, and she was borne away through the thickest and blackest of the darkness, whither they could not follow.

'Oh, Avice! Avice!' they cried in despairing tones, 'where are you hastening? Oh, do not rush into that dismal gloom!'

'Nay, dear brothers,' answered her sweet voice,

which sounded sweeter still, as she vanished from their sight, 'it is not darkness, but glorious light, such as we have never yet beheld. Do, do come; and you too will know how bright it is!'

Ira stood still, in silent fear, watching his sister's retreating figure, while Urbane strove hard to plunge after her into the thick gloom; but, no! he could not follow. Through the black darkness little Avice must journey alone, and yet it evidently was no darkness to her, nor was it solitude, for as her childish form was gradually lost to view, they heard her silvery voice at intervals, saying, in more joyous accents than ever,—

'It is all so beautiful! so bright! And there I see Him, our Elder Brother! He has come to meet me, and lead me to His glorious Home! Oh, it is all so beautiful!'

The brothers paused as they listened to the little voice, and then, when it had died away in the distance, Urbane sat down in the dark spot and wept.

'Oh! why could I not follow thee?' he cried; 'why is Avice the first to see our Brother, and *I* left behind, to journey on without her sweet companionship?'

An answer came in a 'still, small voice,' which said, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' And again I heard that voice saying, 'Thy Brother hath yet further work for thee ere thou reach His Kingdom.' 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.' And I saw that Urbane arose, and thanking his Guide for gently reminding him of the glorious privilege intrusted to him, he pursued his way; reflecting, as he now looked on the thorn he carried, that it was so much larger than his cherished sister's, because his opportunities of covering it were to be more in number than hers; he now remembered that when Avice had last been near them, her little thorn had looked like a bright ray of sunlight, so brilliant were the jewels, and so closely placed upon it.

'And oh!' I heard him whisper, 'if our kind Guide will but help me to my journey's end, I will try and let my large thorn shine as brightly with its jewelled covering, as did my sister's smaller one!'

Once more I heard the 'still, small voice,' and it said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!'

CHAPTER IV.

'From strength to strength go on,
Wrestle, and fight, and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well-fought day.'
Hymns Ancient and Modern.

A SHORT distance from where the brothers had lost sight of Avice, they were met by a gay, laughing crowd, amongst which I recognised many faces that I had seen lifted up in eager attention to the venerable speaker whom the children had met in the beginning of their journey. This giddy throng was headed by one in gorgeous apparel, and with a crown upon his head, beneath whose smiling countenance, however, I could perceive there lurked much hidden malice; as he drew nearer, I saw written in flaming letters upon his brow, 'PRINCE OF THIS WORLD.' Then I saw that Urbane,

consulting his Brother's directions, found therein, '*The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in* ME;' and he earnestly begged his Guide to stand by and help him in the struggle which he felt sure must ensue, with the enemy who had waged war with his Elder Brother, and who now continued the contest with all those remaining of that blessed Family.

Coming up with deceitful smiles, this 'prince' took notice of Ira's eagerness for the delicious fruits and pleasant flowers he was still anxious to seize; he took notice, too, of Urbane's diligent search for jewels wherewith to cover his thorn.

'Come with me!' he called in friendly tones; 'I will give all you can possibly desire—fruit so sweet, that nought here can equal it; flowers of hues so rich and perfumes so rare, that these are dull and scentless in comparison; and I will promise *you*,' he continued, turning to Urbane, 'gems so gloriously brilliant, that those in your hand will seem but as pebbles beside them. Come, throw away such trumpery baubles and join my merry company!'

'Nay,' replied the boy bravely, 'that can never be, for you and your company are opposed to my Elder Brother. I have a Guide with me Who has promised

to direct my paths, *He* shows me where to find jewels 'more precious than rubies,' and I know that the gain thereof will be 'better than fine gold.' It is the gems *you* falsely offer which will be as pebbles, yea rather as hot firebrands, in comparison with all I shall find on the road to our Brother's Home.'

'Oh, Urbane, be not rash!' exclaimed Ira, pale with terror at his young brother's bold defiance of the powerful 'prince.' 'Perhaps it may be true, for see! in that path, down which he is leading his merry troop there are brighter and larger gems than we have seen here. Suppose we go just a little way to see whether he is right or not.'

Then I heard the voice of the unseen Guide sounding in the air, and warning the wayward youth,—

'Walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path, who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness.'

Ira hesitated, and had almost decided on keeping with his brother, under the safe direction of their Guide, when again the Tempter came forward, and, taking his hand, pointed down the path whither he would lead the boys, and showed how smooth it was, how beautiful the large clusters of ripe fruit, hanging

in abundance, as far as the eye could reach; there were jewels, too, which seemed to lie as gravel on the ground, all along that downward path. No wonder that the boy longed to turn aside with his newly-found companions: but then, what had his good Elder Brother said respecting this 'prince' and all his fair promises? '*He hath nothing in* ME.' What said the Guide, when his looks and thoughts went down the tempting pathway?

'Hear, O My son, and receive My sayings. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away!'

'Oh, Ira, my dear, dear brother!' cried Urbane, 'hearken once more to the voice of our loving Guide! "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." Often hast thou disregarded His gentle entreaties, and scorned His tender rebukes; oh! do it now no more! for we know that He will never go with those who travel down yonder path; and whither can we journey without His guidance and companionship?'

'*Whither can you journey!*' laughed the 'prince,'

as Urbane said these words; 'why, you can journey with me and my goodly company down that pleasant vale I have shown you. Linger not, my friends; wherefore should you tarry? Come, and let us hasten on our way;' and he again took Ira's hand. The boy did not resist; but smiling at his new leader, he said to his brother,—

'Oh! Urbane, come, too; you say you are seeking jewels, and look how many lie in the path down which I mean to journey!'

'Yes,' added the 'prince,' 'all those things, yea and all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, will I give thee, if thou wilt but join us, and acknowledge *me* as the rightful sovereign of these realms.'

Then Urbane drew himself up to his full height, and eyed the Tempter with a steady, unwavering glance, while he begged the gracious Guide to stand ever at his side; and he answered in fearless tones,—

'Traitor! *your* kingdom lies in outer darkness at the end of that smooth, easy-looking path, down which you would lure me; *there*, and there only, are you monarch; but the one true Sovereign of these realms is my Elder Brother, the "KING OF KINGS,

AND LORD OF LORDS," and as He once fought and overcame you, when, in like words, you sought to tempt His pure Nature, so do I, in His glorious Name, challenge you to combat!'

With this bold speech, the boy dealt a blow at his enemy, which, to my great surprise, felled him to the ground; but, though bruised in his fall, I saw that the 'prince of this world' quickly rose, and without appearing in the least crestfallen, attacked his young assailant vigorously. I saw Urbane fall; but he sprang up lightly, quite unhurt, exclaiming triumphantly, 'Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! when I fall, I shall arise.'

And so, indeed, it befel, for after each struggle the boy grew stronger, whilst his adversary became perceptibly weakened. Though I could not see the invisible Guide, yet, from Urbane's many appeals for help, and frequent ejaculations of gratitude, I perceived that He was ever near, rendering much powerful aid: and more than once, methought a bright sword flashed through the air, sorely wounding the cowardly adversary, who roared aloud with pain. After the struggle had lasted above an hour, the Tempter yielded to his valiant opponent, and, totally

overcome, sank exhausted to the ground; for, as I have said, each fall and each blow weakened his boasted power, while it added new strength and courage to the young Urbane, who, when the victory was confessed to be his, knelt on the greensward, and thanked the Guide for help in the time of need, without which he could never have conquered the treacherous foe; then rising, he turned to Ira, and once more entreated him, with tears, to abandon the fatal scheme of joining that reckless party, in their journey down the vale.

'See!' he said, pointing to the prostrate leader, 'how easily he is overcome; when he finds one will not yield, he gives up the contest.'

'Oh! but, Urbane, I could not fight as you have done,' replied Ira; 'and behold, he is even now recovered, and waiting to conduct us all down this pleasant road, which I really believe to be a better way to take than yours.'

Truly, there stood the Tempter close to Ira's right hand, though he dared not go very nigh to the victorious Urbane. He cast a look of malicious disappointment on his conqueror, and then, with a smile of triumph, he started, with Ira and the rest of his

troop, down the pleasant-looking road which led but to 'outer darkness.'

As the misguided boy hurried away, a voice, which I knew to be that of the invisible Guide, sounded mournfully,—

'He would not hearken to My voice, and would none of Me, so I gave him up unto his own heart's lust, and he walked in his own counsels. Oh that he had hearkened unto Me, and had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued his enemies, and turned My hand against his adversaries.'

CHAPTER V.

'But if indeed with reckless faith
We trust the flattering voice,
Which whispers, "Take thy fill ere death
Indulge thee and rejoice;"

'Too surely, every setting day
Some lost delight we mourn,
The flowers all die along our path,
Till we, too, die forlorn.'—*Christian Year.*

SO I watched on, and though the courses of the two brothers differed widely, both lay within reach of my vision; indeed, strange to say, they ran almost side by side for a long way; and, as had been the case when I first observed them, the travellers were forced on by the same irresistible Power, which would allow none to stand still; many a one of Ira's hapless company would have gladly loitered along the way, but it was wholly impossible.

As the rebellious band moved on in its downward

course, I could see that, notwithstanding their frequent bursts of noisy mirth, its members were less cheerful and less cared for than was Urbane in the pathway he had wisely taken; for as these misguided ones went farther on, they found that what had appeared to be shining jewels were in reality dull pebbles, or worse still, hot, burning cinders, which left their poor fingers sore for many an hour. The fruits which had seemed so ripe, had but a nauseous taste; and I saw that all who were of the false prince's company were growing heartily weary of their self-chosen road. Some few, indeed, strove to enter the rough but peaceful path along which Urbane was patiently toiling; and those who persevered in resisting the Tempter's opposition, succeeded, by help of the merciful Guide, whose aid they earnestly invoked in their distress; they indeed found the difficult ways more crooked and rough than did the young traveller, who had begun at the outset by following the blessed Guide.

Ira, alas! was not one of those who endeavoured to find the way of peace, after wearying of the ways of darkness. In vain did Urbane implore him to forsake his traitorous leader; but no! the deceitful

Tempter still persuaded his deluded host that the fruits would soon prove themselves much sweeter, a *little* farther, and a *little farther on;* and that they could easily turn back by-and-bye, should they wish to do so. Thus lured on by fair, though false, promises, the erring band glided down the valley path; and when wishing to return, each member was fast hemmed in by the 'prince' and his emissaries.

By-and-bye they had wandered far out of sight, and I then heard voices uplifted in agony, crying piteously for mercy, but it was too late; and long and sadly did the mournful echoes ring in mine ears, of that weeping and gnashing of teeth, which I knew proceeded from the realms of outer darkness, where the 'prince' was exulting over his victims, and in the thought of having robbed the KING OF KINGS of some few lawful subjects.

And how fared it with Urbane the while? He watched his brother's retreating footsteps with tearful eyes, but he knew that sorrow for Ira's erring ways must not hinder his own search for the precious jewels; and I heard him say to his faithful Guide, 'Oh show me Thy ways, and teach me Thy paths! Let me not wander from Thy commandments!'

At that moment he perceived another thorn, smaller than the one he held; it lay at his feet, and was Ira's, which, unnoticed by either brother, had fallen to the ground, as the wayward boy had turned aside with the traitor into the Valley of Destruction. Urbane picked it up, resolving, if possible, to cover it also with radiant gems meet for his Elder Brother's crown; and then, for the first time, I saw that his own thorn was already brilliantly covered; and I heard the sound of sweet voices, ringing through the air, saying, —

'Unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.'

CHAPTER VI.

'Jerusalem the golden!
With milk and honey blest;
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and voice opprest.
I know not, oh! I know not,
What joys await us there;
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare.'

St. Bernard (Translation).

I NOTICED that as Urbane went further on his journey, the way grew less toilsome and difficult. Was it that in trusting more implicitly to his Guide, the crooked ways were made straight and the rough places plain? Ever and anon, I heard the boy's clear voice, singing in cheerful accents, as though addressing his Royal Brother,—

'Lead me by Thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me.

Smooth let it be, or rough,
It will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it leads
Right onward to Thy rest.

The kingdom that I seek
Is Thine, so let the way
That leads to it be Thine,
Else must I surely stray.'

And so joyous and peaceful did his face become, that I thought surely some ray of light from his Brother's glorious Kingdom must be reflected in it; and still more narrowly did I watch his footsteps as he drew nearer the end of the long and dangerous pathway; nearer the setting sun, where it seemed his journey would end. And oh! the brightness that glowed on everything around was glorious to behold; it reminded me somewhat of the radiant light about little Avice's footsteps, as she was treading through the darkness, to meet their loving Elder Brother; and again I heard the sweet voices ringing through the air, and chanting,

'Brighter still and brighter
Glows the western sun,
Shedding all its gladness
O'er our work that 's done.
.
Bliss, all bliss excelling,
When the ransomed soul,
Earthly toils forgetting,
Finds its promised goal.'

Urbane, likewise, heard the heavenly strains, and a smile of holy gladness lit up his features as he drew nearer to the 'western sun,' and nearer also to what might have appeared to many eyes thick gloom, and a 'darkness which might be felt,' more terrible to penetrate than any difficulty he had yet encountered in the path already traversed; but I was permitted to see (what every eye could not) how Urbane trod amidst the light of brilliant rays that issued from the Royal Brother's throne, and I heard his glad voice triumphantly exclaim that the KING OF KINGS was come to meet him, and that little Avice, too, was there, clad in white raiment, and joining her voice in glorious music, with many more who had safely trod through weary and dangerous roads, and who, 'with their Leader,' had 'conquered in the fight.' And I fancied that Urbane must have laid his two brightly-covered thorns at his Elder Brother's feet, for I heard his voice, as if in answer to some gracious words of praise, 'Unto Thy name give glory.' And as he vanished amidst the glorious rays of the 'western sun,' which shone through the darkness, I caught the echo of his departing words, 'Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory!'

Once more the chorus of angel-voices sounded in the air above me, singing in tones such as earth has never known,—

'Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard,
Nor to man's hearts hath come,
What for those loving Thee in truth
Thou hast in love's own home!'

I awoke, and behold it was a dream!

NOTE.—The hymns attributed to the 'angel-voices' may be found in the well-known collection entitled *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (Nos. 335 and 155). Urbane's song is taken from a poem by the Rev. Dr. Bonar in the *Lyra Anglicana*, 'Thy Way, not Mine.'

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